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A FATEFUL GAME; OR, WEDDED AND PARTED.

BY SARA CLAXTON,

AUTHOR OF "WHICH WAS THE WOMAN?" "FOR HER DEAR SAKE," "LEAP YEAR," ETC., ETC.



"HERE, DEAR, DRINK THIS!" SHE SAID, HANDING THE WAYFARER A LARGE CUP OF COFFEE.

A Fateful Game;

OR WEDDED AND PARTED.

BY SARA CLAXTON.

CHAPTER I.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

It was sunset; the March winds blew raw and cold from the East River from whose turbid bosom, swollen by recent rains, floated crafts of various sizes, imparting to its loneliness an air of cheerfulness and life.

A young girl, fair and fragile, stood gazing over the Brooklyn Bridge with an unmistakable air of gentility and refinement pervading her whole appearance, albeit she was clad in garments so threadbare and meager that she might well be mistaken for some poor outcast, a mere waif upon the ocean of life, buffeted by its storms, destitute and fallen, driven here to die in sight of mansions, warehouses, and comfortable dwellings.

Yet she had not fallen, but had simply been deserted by one who had sworn at the altar to love and cherish her until death parted them.

Her face was wan, but even its wanness did not destroy its beautiful contour, and over her shapely shoulders fell curling locks of jetty hair, black as midnight, or as the sable hue of the raven's wing.

Her blue eyes, lacking now their wonted luster—for she was weak and ill, and the March winds chilled her feeble frame with an icy chilliness like that of death itself—were bent upon the river, the last home of many a despairing soul, wistfully, oh, so wistfully!

She was a girl in years, but a woman in suffering, which had stamped itself in her pallid face, and which time and altered circumstances could alone efface.

She yearned for some haven of rest, for loving, sympathizing words, the gift of sweet charity, and had failed to obtain anything.

Down there in that rush of water she might find rest, and feel no more the pangs of cold and hunger, and of utter wretchedness.

The chimes from a neighboring steeple pealing forth an evening hymn, one she had often sung herself in the long ago when things were brighter and happier, awoke her to a sense of life and its responsibilities.

Drawing her coarse plaid shawl about her, she walked on, swaying to and fro in the wind—walked away from temptation and the gates of death, into the well-lighted streets, and felt that she was not alone in the world; that a bright happy future might be hers, if she only struggled bravely with present adversity.

Oh, glorious hope!—choicest and best of Heaven's gifts to poor humanity! How many hast thou snatched from death and everlasting misery!

"Where can I go? What am I to do? My aunt is rich, but she is cold and proud; but still I am her sister's child, and will make an effort to obtain from her shelter and protection, although my heart should break in the attempt!"

She had done well in making this decision; it was the first step in the future of her young life, and flung into the bitter past the old life.

She panted onward to the goal of her hopes, resting occasionally on a friendly doorstep to regain strength.

She passed by an oyster stall kept by a buxom young woman, who pitied her forlorn condition, and who perceived from her tottering gait that she was ill unto death almost.

"Here, dear, drink this!" she said, handing the wayfarer a large cup of coffee, steaming and fragrant, and promising to impart fresh life and vigor to the poor girl to whom it was offered.

"Thanks!" she said, faintly; "you are very kind, but I cannot pay for it; I have no money."

"Never mind that. Surely Mary Frost can

afford a crust and a warm drink to one so ill as you are, and who is a woman like herself; so sit you down, dear, and warm your cold hands over the fire."

Dora Merton—for such was her name—thankfully accepted the proffered hospitality, and warmed her shivering hands before she could grasp the cup.

Never did meal taste so delicious as that plain fare of which she now partook; it seemed to bring her back to life, to quicken her pulses, and to warm her benumbed frame.

Mary Frost appeared in her eyes an angel of mercy, who had been sent to her aid in this her dire extremity, and never to her dying day would she forget the generous deed.

The gift did not cost the donor much; but it was not like the alms of the rich man who gives out of his abundance, and is praised and flattered by his fellow-man for his munificence.

There was not even any one present to note the kindly act, or to say, "Heaven bless your kind heart!"

But the angels—those bright messengers of love—looked down with approving eyes and beaming smiles upon Mary Frost.

Taking Dora's thin hands between her coarse, rough ones, she chafed them gently, and spoke words of hope and comfort, which sunk deep into the soul of the listener, and seemed to her like a message of comfort from above.

As Mary gazed on that wan face, it struck her suddenly that she had seen it somewhere before.

"Weren't you at the lying-in ward at Bellevue?—and weren't you in the same room with me?" she asked. "Of course you were! Don't you remember your little baby died, and you lost something that hung about your neck?"

Seeing the tears in Dora's eyes, she hastened to say, in a tone of real contrition, "It was cruel of me to remind you of that! You'll forgive me, won't you?"

Dora pressed her hand, and, smiling through her tears, said: "I have often wept for my little one without being reminded of my loss. You have too kind a heart to willingly give pain to anybody. You are right in your conjecture; I was there, and am happy to meet you again."

Before parting Mary made Dora promise to call upon her at her home in Brooklyn, adding, "You'll be pleased to see my little darling, he grows such a fine fellow!"

Dora consented, and left her kind friend to wend her way to a mansion where she was very doubtful of her reception.

It gave her fresh courage to think that she was not quite alone in the world; that a home and a shelter had been offered her by Mary Frost.

She looked back and saw her friend smiling, and nodding, and waving her hand to her; and a silent prayer went up from her heart to One who understood how genuine it was, and who would be pleased to receive it, because it told of the kindness of a loving, sympathizing heart for another who was desolate and oppressed.

CHAPTER II.

POOR HUMANITY.

SOME months previous to the opening of this story, and in a ward of a New York hospital, a young girl, very beautiful and fragile, was lying on a bed, one of a score or more that were there.

Each bedstead was screened off from his neighbor by faultlessly white curtains; nor were the bed-clothes a whit less clean.

The apartment, into which light was admitted through dim windows, gave the observer an idea of cheerfulness and comfort, but this was soon dispelled by sobs of anguish and wailing cries of infants.

It was a lying-in ward, and the patients were of the humbler class—women who, through poverty or misfortune, had sought refuge there in the time of their trouble.

And some of them had seen better days. One look at the beautiful young creature with

whom we have just been made acquainted would be sufficient to convince us of this.

The delirium of fever was in her blue eyes, which shone with unnatural brightness, and spiritualized her face, and made her appear like a being of another world.

Her child lay on her arm, and she pressed it closely to her bosom, as if taught by instinct to do so, reason being fast merging into madness.

Occasionally a gleam of intelligence came to her countenance, and she looked about, as if watching for the arrival of somebody, possibly a relative or friend.

In these lucid intervals she groped feebly for a silken bag which hung around her neck, and on finding it smiled joyfully.

It was Dora Merton, who awaited the coming of a rich aunt, whom the nurse had been sent for, by permission of the matron, as the patient was thought to be dying.

It was a kindly act this, and robbed death of its worst sting; for to die alone and among strangers, with no loving hand to touch ours or to smooth our pillow, adds to the torture of our last moments.

In an adjoining bed lay Mary Frost.

Poor Dora little knew that her aunt would refuse to attend her bedside, or to give her a promise that she would care for her infant at her death. Hope buoyed her up, and was so strongly fixed in her breast, that even in her delirium she clung to it.

The nurse had executed her mission, and had seen Mrs. Blandford in all her splendor.

She was admitted by a footman in gorgeous livery, who looked her up and down with cool effrontery, and gave a contemptuous toss of the head at her dress and general appearance.

"You ought to have gone to the harem, young person," he said, with magisterial severity, and with a look of indignation before which she ought to have quailed, but didn't.

"Is your mistress at home?" she said.

"Not to you," he answered. "You had better see the housekeeper."

"It would be worse for you if I told my business to any one but Mrs. Blandford, young man!"

During this altercation the lady whom she sought had overheard her name and a part of the conversation, and having called the footman to her, asked him why he permitted such an unseemly disturbance to go on.

He explained; and being curious to know the woman's business, told him to show her into the ante-room, where a few minutes later she joined her.

"What is your business with me?" she asked, imperiously.

"My name is Susan Prat," she replied, "and I am a nurse at Bellevue Hospital."

"Indeed!" was the sneering reply. "I can't see how your business can concern me. I have no pauper relatives!"

"Your niece is one at this moment, madam!" said Susan, insolently; for she was nettled at the disdainful way in which she had been received.

"My niece? Impossible!" said Mrs. Blandford, startled out of her haughtiness by this astonishing statement.

"Is your niece's name Dora Merton?" asked the nurse, with a malicious twinkle in her gray eye.

"It is. But how came she there?"

"You had better ask her. She wants to see you."

"Me!"—this with a look of horror on her rouged face. "How could she think I would visit her there?"

"Well, marm," said Susan, demurely, "I suppose she thinks you ought to love your own flesh and blood. But don't be afraid; there ain't no fear of contagion. My ward is clean, and we take in nobody there but poor souls with little babies."

Susan Prat hated her superiors simply because they were such, and now that she had an opportunity of humiliating one of them, enjoyed the occasion greatly.

Mrs. Blandford sunk into a chair, and murmured, "Wretched girl, what a disgrace!"

She forgot that it was owing to her this "wretched girl," as she styled her, was compelled to seek an asylum in a hospital.

Dora had written to her a most piteous letter, begging, for her dead mother's sake, that she would take pity on her forlorn condition, and help her.

This, in common with other letters from the same source, was consigned to the flames unopened.

"It ain't no disgrace in her case," said Susan, bluntly; "she's a married woman—I saw the ring on her finger. Will you come to her? I am afraid she's dying, poor thing!"

"Dying!—I am so glad!" said Mrs. Blandford, unable to conceal the joy which this intelligence afforded her.

"But she may recover," said Susan, maliciously, "so don't count your chickens before they're hatched, madam. I may be poor, and only a hospital nurse, but I'd scorn to say what you have just said."

"You mistake me," said Mrs. Blandford, hastily. "But tell me; you say you are poor; would money be of any use to you? Would you refuse a present?"

"Would a hungry man refuse bread?" she replied. "I love money, and have always envied those who possess it. Money is power; to be rich is the ambition of my life. I would do anything for gold."

"Anything?" echoed Mrs. Blandford.

"Anything, except risk my neck."

"Of course—of course," said Mrs. Blandford. "I would never ask you to do that. Now let us understand each other. I have a niece who has evidently married beneath her, and brought disgrace upon her family; you say she is dying, but may perchance recover. Is that so?"

"She is young, and our doctor is a skillful man; why shouldn't she recover?"

"Exactly," said Mrs. Blandford, blandly.

"No doubt a great deal depends upon you?"

"Yes; everything does. If I forgot to give her her medicine, or let her take a chill, or neglected her in any way, a doctor's skill—and for that matter a thousand doctors'—could not save her."

"And you say she may die?"

"Yes; the doctor has almost given her up, and looks to me to help him to pull her through; but I have a lot to attend to, my hands are pretty full at the present moment, and I might forget to look after her sufficiently. A little money is very acceptable to a nurse, and does a lot in a case like your niece's."

Mrs. Blandford gave a searching look at Susan, and said: "Not a penny of my money will be given to you to gain her more attention. She has disgraced our family, and I would willingly pay you money—ay, a large sum—to hear from your lips that she was dead!"

Susan Prat started from her seat, and looked earnestly at the speaker, as she asked, in a voice hoarse with emotion, "What do you mean? How much would you give?"

There was a look of triumph in Mrs. Blandford's snaky eyes as she listened to these words.

"Oh," she said, carelessly, "how much shall we put it at—five hundred dollars?"

"Hist! speak low; walls have ears. We are talking of murder."

"Nonsense! the doctor has given her up; you have other patients, and need not pay her particular attention;—all this I leave to you."

Susan Prat played nervously with the back of the chair, as, with blanched cheeks and terror-laden eyes, she looked at her temptress, and muttered, "Make it six hundred! There's the child, you know!"

"Ah," said Mrs. Blandford, with a smile, "I had forgotten that! It would be a pity it should outlive its mother! I will say five hundred and fifty!"

"Give me an earnest that you will pay me. I want money now!"

And she stretched out her long, lean fingers as if to grasp the filthy lucre her soul thirsted after.

Mrs. Blandford counted out twenty-five dollar gold pieces, which the other clutched tightly, and placed hastily in her pocket.

"Mind," said Mrs. Blandford, "great caution will be needed not to compromise yourself in any way."

She opened the door, and Susan Prat passed through, just as Thomas, the footman, came up.

Neither of the guilty pair attached any importance to this; but they little knew or dreamt that he had been playing the eavesdropper.

He let the nurse out, muttering, "Thomas Sutton, you're a made man if you only play your cards well!"

Meanwhile, Dora Merton and her infant hovered 'twixt life and death, little recking of the foul conspiracy designed to rob them of their chances of recovery.

And the shadows grew deeper and lengthened, as a solitary woman made her way, with cat-like tread, keeping within the shadows, and avoiding busy thoroughfares, in the direction of Bellevue Hospital.

CHAPTER III.

FOUL PLAY.

DURING Susan Prat's absence, Dora's delirium increased. It was a mercy she did not destroy her baby in her struggle with an imaginary enemy.

The little creature slipped off her arm, and lay in safety, while she arose, and murmured hoarsely, "Give me water! I thirst—I die!"

Mary Frost had kindly looked in upon her from time to time, and on hearing her mutterings did so again.

A less superstitious person might have mistaken what she saw for something supernatural.

A thin, child like face, so white at the temples and forehead; the burning red of the cheeks; the wild feverish eyes, flashing like stars; the long, thick tresses sweeping down like a thick veil to the coverlet; the thin, white hands and arms, uplifted in wild grace; the slender form, waving like the stalk of some tall flower that threatens to break with the first blast of wind—all these were enough to freeze the blood in Mary's veins, and send her frightened speech in fragments to her lips.

"What is the matter?" she asked at last.

"I am parched—I want drink; my head throbs, my bosom is full of aching fire; my hands—put them in cold water, they are so hot! They will not let me touch it while they burn so!"

Mary ran to her own bed, seized a basin of cold tea, and held it to Dora's parched lips, who drank it down as if it had been nectar.

Then she coaxed her to return to her bed, smoothed down her long tresses with her hands, and by a hundred gentle womanly caresses soothed her delirium.

Susan Prat returned at this juncture, and chided Mary sharply for being out of bed. There was something in the woman's looks that roused Mary's suspicions, and determined her to keep watch upon the nurse's movements.

But tired nature prevented her good resolutions from being carried into effect, and she slept soundly and sweetly, with pleasant dreams.

It was midnight, and the whole apartment was steeped in profound silence, broken only by the regular breathing of the sleepers, or the occasional wailing of an infant.

Ah, me! and those who now slept so soundly and peacefully would have to wake one day in the busy world, to battle against poverty and distress, with aching hearts and tired hands and brains, to win bread for themselves and their offspring.

It was indeed a haven of rest and peace for these poor wayfarers.

Yonder something dark, shadowy in the dim light, stoops like a vampire over a sleeping form, and disturbs the sleeper, who moans feebly and moves restlessly.

'Twas Susan Prat, who with a sharp scissors cuts the ribbon, and detaches the silken bag from Dora's neck, and hastily thrusts it out of sight.

'Twas a cruel; shameful act, for it deprived Dora of the badge of her womanly honor—her marriage certificate.

"Twenty golden pieces," she muttered, hoarsely, like the croaking of some bird of evil omen, "and more to come when you are dead!"

With the soft tread of a panther she stole from behind the curtains, and moved silently and with oblique glances to her own dormitory, where an array of bottles, corked and labeled, stood on a table.

Selecting one of these marked "morphia," she murmured, "This will bring me money in plenty."

Then she stole swiftly and silently to Dora's side, and, rousing her by gentle force, put a spoonful of the deadly drug to her lips; but the girl struggled, and some portion of it was spilt.

Susan Prat did not fear detection, as the doctor had ordered her patient a sleeping draught.

When she emerged from behind the curtains, she looked the guilty thing she was; with ashy cheeks and bloodless lips and eyes that drooped and cowered beneath their lashes.

The morning broke, and the pale light of day streamed into the room, chasing away night shadows. Dora Merton lay to all appearance dead, and foully slain by one whose duty it was to keep burning the flickering lamp of life by every effort in her power.

CHAPTER IV.

UNEXPECTED KINDNESS.

It will be apparent that our heroine, Dora Merton, escaped death as by a miracle, as she had only been thrown into a long, deep sleep by the morphia.

She made her way in safety to Mrs. Blandford's mansion in Madison Square, feeling tired and weary, but resolute to carry out her purpose.

She clung to the iron railings with her hands, and looked up earnestly at the front of the building, which loomed above her with forbidding grandeur.

And gazed at the sculptured lions crouching on the stone pedestals, which appeared to be guarding the entrance and to frown her away.

Her dizzy brain reeled, and objects swam about her in hazy confusion; but she held on firmly to the iron supports, whose touch seemed to penetrate to her inmost soul, and made her writhe and shiver as if in mortal agony.

"Oh, Heaven!" she murmured, "support and comfort me!"

And as if in answer to her prayer, there came a bright flash, which seemed to pierce through her dim eyes to her heart, and strengthen her.

It was only the gas which had just been lit within the house, causing a flood of light to flow out through the stained sashes of a bay window; but it fell like an omen of good, like a gorgeous rain around her, illuminating and soothing her misery. Could those cold, chiseled lions have a heart more stony than hers to whom she was about to appeal?

She looked at the basement as if instinctively feeling that in her present circumstances she ought to seek admittance there.

"No," she said, with pride in her tone; "I am poor and friendless, but her sister's child still, and will enter there"—looking as she spoke, at the broad entrance.

There was no irresolution now in her steps. She ascended bravely, and rung the bell, struggling heroically against her weakness, and sustained by that moral courage which is the only true bravery of womanhood.

"Why should I fear?" she thought. "I have done no wrong; poverty is no crime! I am her equal by birth, and will dare her scorn, even if I die at her feet!"

The door was opened by a footman, the

same whom we have met before—namely, Thomas Sutton, with whom life seemed to have gone well, judging by his visage, which was flushed, and had a look of contented pride.

"Now, then," he said, with a supercilious stare, which conveyed more of insolence than words could have done; "go down to the basement; that's the sort of place for folks that come with bundles. Can't answer any questions here."

Dora pushed, or, rather, tottered, past him, and sat down with the light of a tinted lantern overhead falling directly upon her.

In spite of her shabby attire, Thomas Sutton, it was plain, perceived something in her air, and the pure loveliness of her features, that checked his rising impertinence.

"Tell your mistress that her niece wishes to speak with her."

"What name, please, miss?" he asked, with more deference than he usually showed to persons of her seeming class.

"Take my message," she said; "it will suffice."

He walked away up-stairs, muttering, "Bless me, here's a go! Didn't know she had a niece! Can't look down upon me in future! This must be another niece, then! Got any more, I wonder? The last disappeared in an ugly way. But there, I can't grumble; it made a man of me!"

Poor Dora thought every second an hour, and conjured up all kinds of unpleasant things, and fancied that the door would be shut against her, and she be made to encounter the world alone and friendless.

It flashed across her brain how different had been her reception in days gone by. Then, arrayed in silks and velvets, and with her dear mother as a companion, she had been received cordially; now clad as lowly as the lowest in the land, she must, perforce, sit—nay, crouch like a beggar waiting for alms, while a menial took her message to her aunt.

She could never understand why it was that her mother's death should have plunged her from affluence into comparative poverty, especially as she had been told that her aunt was to be her future guardian.

Her poor mother had died suddenly, and everything became wretched in her young life.

These painful reflections were cut short by the return of the footman, who said, "You may go to Mrs. Blandford's room—she will see you; but let me tell you, she don't look too well pleased."

"There's something wrong," he muttered, as he watched her. "The missus looked scared, and turned as pale as a ghost when I told her. If Susan Prat has been playing any game for her, she'll smart for it."

Dora made her way to her aunt's bed-chamber, which was fitted up in a style of grandeur that contrasted strangely with her own mean appearance.

But life is nothing but a series of contrasts—mountain and valley, tears and smiles, woods and deserts, poverty and riches, splendor and squalor, vice and virtue.

On an elegant crimson satin lounge sat a tall lady, whose age might be computed at fifty-five with a slight frown on her forehead, and a visage as white as the curtains surrounding her bed.

She had evidently been disturbed while completing her evening toilet, for although her rich velvet and satin robe fell around her in voluminous folds, her head dress of cream satin and golden acorns hung upon a branch of her toilet-glass, while several diamond ornaments sparkled on the table.

Her eyes had been fixed with terror upon the door through which Dora must enter, and on seeing her she gave a slight scream, and started to her feet, grasping the back of her lounge.

"Away!" she said, hoarsely, waving Dora back with her disengaged hand. "I did not do it! It was another!"

The poor girl perceived that her aunt was

perturbed, and mistook her for an apparition; but why she could not imagine.

"'Tis I—Dora, your sister's child. Do not drive me away, aunt. I was ill—very ill, and they thought me dead; but I survived, and am here to ask you to help me."

Mrs. Blandford sunk down upon the lounge trembling violently, and saying, in hoarse gasps, "Give me water! Quick!"

Dora's hand was on the bell to summon assistance, when her aunt said, "No, no! Let us be alone! Water!"

Dora poured some from a carafe into a glass, and held it to her aunt's lips, who quickly revived, and motioned her to a seat.

Neither spoke for some moments. Dora felt puzzled how to break the chilling silence, while her aunt was striving to regain her scattered senses.

Had Susan Prat been there at that moment she would have trembled, for over Mrs. Blandford's face came an expression of hate and revenge at the perfidy practiced on her.

"Well," she said, at last, "why have you come here? I thought you were still with Madame Josephine in Sixth avenue. I had been dozing and dreaming of the past when you entered, and thought my poor sister had returned from the grave to visit me; hence my alarm and confusion."

Dora, although she could not well understand why her aunt had mistaken her for the apparition of her mother, was compelled to accept the explanation, and merely said: "I left Madame's to be married. Don't be angry, aunt. I wrote you several letters, asking your permission, but received no answer; and, as you know, you forbade me to come here."

Mrs. Blandford remembered having received the letters and also her injunction; but she wanted a pretext for being angry with her niece, and said: "Why have you disobeyed me? Why did you not write now?"

"Because I am desperate. Look at my clothes! I have not one penny in my pocket or hardly a shoe to my foot. My baby is dead, or its sweet smiles and kisses would have made me feel that I was not alone in the world. My husband has gone away I know not whither. Will you help me?"

"I will answer that question presently. First let me ask you who is this man?"

"I dare not tell you his name; he wishes it to be kept secret."

"Ah, I can quite understand that," was the sneering reply. "He first deceived and then deserted you?"

"It is false," she answered, hotly; then recollecting that it would be unwise to vex her aunt, she added, quickly: "Oh, aunt, pray forgive me! You do not know him, or you would not think so badly of him. He is noble, and good, and, oh, so kind! And he loves me, and I love him. He found me alone and friendless, and took me to his heart because he thought me good and beautiful. Ay, and I will be true to him! Oh, aunt, for mercy's sake, do not be unkind to me! I have endured much—enough to turn these locks gray. I have wandered about the streets and envied the beggar the hard crust or the pennies given him in charity; but I dared not ask for alms—my pride would not allow me, for am I not my mother's child and his wife?"

There was something so touching, so full of pathos, in what she listened to, that, hard-hearted and indifferent as this woman was, she could not refrain from a feeling of pity, although she struggled hard against the emotion mastering her.

"Where is your marriage certificate?" she asked.

"Alas! it was taken from me in the hospital. But see, here is the ring which his dear hand placed on my finger" (and she kissed the ring passionately). "I have often wanted bread, but would rather starve than part with it!"

The woman to whom she was speaking knew too well that she spoke the truth, for the missing certificate was then in her possession.

"This is mere romance!" she said, with a

sneer. "Now listen to me, Dora. I do not forget the relationship in which you stand to me, or the disgrace you have brought upon it."

Here Dora made a gesture of dissent.

"Pray do not interrupt," her aunt said, severely. "I wish to help you."

"Oh, thank you, aunt!" she said, seizing and kissing her hand in the exuberance of her gratitude. She had found a haven of rest at last, she thought.

"I am a member of the Charity Organization Society," Mrs. Blandford said, with dignity, "and do not believe in indiscriminate almsgiving."

"Alms!"—and the hot blood suffused Dora's face and neck.

"It is a noble society, but I cannot send you there, as you are my niece. If you behave yourself to my satisfaction, I will allow you three dollars a week. Here is the first installment in advance," taking out the money from her costly purse, and dropping it into Dora's hand.

"Thank you, aunt," she said. "Am I to call here every week?"

"Certainly not; let me know your address, and the money will be sent."

Dora offered her hand on saying good-by, but her aunt chose not to see it, and, with a majestic wave of her hand, intimated that the interview was at an end.

The poor girl left with tears in her eyes—tears of bitter humiliation. The bills which she held tightly in her hand seemed to burn into the flesh like calcined iron, and in the hall she let them drop, and walked to the door.

A hand touched her gently on the shoulder, and turning, she saw Thomas Sutton, who said, "Please, miss, you have dropped this; and pray don't be offended if I ask you to accept this trifle as a loan. I had a sister, but she died. Allow me to be your friend. Good-by!"

He closed the door gently, but not before he had caught sight of Susan Prat's well-known face in the area.

CHAPTER V.

AN IMPRUDENT MATCH.

"I WON'T stand this any longer," said Thomas Sutton, to himself. "I resigns my place on the spot. I ain't going to be a footman and the other thing too, a-hoping and a-shutting doors like a nobody, when I am somebody, blest if I am! Here goes for a regular scrimmage."

A bell rung to summon Mrs. Blandford's maid, but Thomas stopped her from going up, and ascending the stairs himself, gave a single knock at the bedroom door, and entered unbidden, saying, "You're looking positively lovely this evening, Clara; haven't you got a kiss for me?"

"Have done with this nonsense!" she said angrily. "Have you no respect for my position?"

"You ain't got much for mine, madam!"

"Ain't!" she said, with a sneer of contempt.

He looked at her angrily, and seating himself on the lounge with every familiarity, and thrusting his hands into both pockets, began to whistle softly.

She tossed her head, and gave him a look of defiance as she put the finishing touches to her toilet.

"Perhaps, sir," she said, with asperity, "when you have come to your senses, you will order my carriage."

"Our carriage you mean! You mocked me just now. I ain't educated, I know; but don't forget that I am your husband—not your servant!"

Her bosom swelled with rage, and her passion seemed to exude in flashes of light through the glittering diamonds which adorned her bust; but she remained contemptuously silent.

"I took you for better or worse, to hold and to cherish until death do us part. So far it

has been all 'worse,' but I means to hold on—what do you think of that? I'll be your footman no longer, madam; I mean to dress like a swell, and go out with you this evening!"

"Sir, you forget yourself; if I have made a gentleman of you, act as one!"

"You are kind—doocid kind; but I don't mean to ask your permission!"

He rose, and approached the bell.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, in a tone of alarm.

"To ring for your maid."

"My maid? Do be decent!"

"Don't be afeered; I ain't a-going to ask her to dress me; I ain't a fine gentleman. I want to tell her who's master in this house."

He looked her steadily in the eyes, and she quailed before his gaze.

Placing her hand on his arm, she said, coaxingly, "For heaven's sake, Thomas, be careful for both our sakes! Do not—do not make an exposure of our folly. We shall go abroad presently, and then we can appear before the world as man and wife—it will be a nine days' wonder; and when we return, people will take to the new state of things quite naturally."

She kissed him, and patted his cheek with her perfumed hand.

He did not return the caress, but looked sullenly defiant.

"See here, Clara," he said; "I ain't a going to be coaxed as if I was a little child. I'm a man with a man's feelings, and I don't like how things are going on. Why did you let your niece and mine go out of this house like a beggar?"

"I suppose you are taken with her pretty face?" she said, with a sneer; "and perhaps you saw her crying?"

"I did!" he said huskily; "and felt ashamed of myself. I ought to have taken her by the hand, and said: 'You stay here, miss; this is your home, and I'm your uncle.' I could punch my own head for not a-doing of it."

She felt ineffable disgust for the honest fellow because he dared to espouse the cause of the weak, and was a little vulgar in the way he expressed himself.

But, in spite of her advantages of wealth and education, he was infinitely her superior; a rough diamond—one of nature's gentlemen, who, with a little of society's polish, would have been admired and respected.

"It is very good of you," she said; "my dear, to take such an interest in a worthless person like Dora Merton. She has disgraced me."

"I won't believe it—there!"

"Your heart is too good!" she said, suavely, while inwardly she felt as if she could strangle him. "I tell you she is worse than bad! It makes me blush even to mention it to you! A girl who's not married" (she winced a little as she told this untruth), "but has had a child, cannot be called respectable."

"It is not her fault; some scoundrel tempted her. I wish I had him here, and I'd show him what I think of his conduct! What you have told me makes me her friend all the more. But enough of this; Susan Prat is down-stairs."

The mere mention of that hateful name filled her breast with rage; and she inwardly swore to be revenged.

"Send her to me," she said. "I shall not go out this evening, and shall not want the carriage."

He was leaving, when she called him back, and said:

"Thomas, you promise me to let things go on between us as they are a little while longer?"

"Yes," he replied; "if you promise to be kind to our niece."

"Yes, yes; of course!" she replied hastily.

When he had gone, she muttered, as her hands worked convulsively:

"He is insolent, contemptible, and must be stopped! He little knows the woman he has to deal with. I have risked much already, and shall not hesitate now."

There was a knock at the door; and at her

bidding, Susan Prat entered with a smirking smile and a courtesy, and a "Good-evening, madam! I hope I see you well?"

"Yes, thank you, Susan," she replied, "I am very well. Have you any news? But stay; you can tell me while you help me to undress. Hang your cloak up yonder, and make yourself at home. If you would like any refreshment, you will find some brandy in yonder sideboard."

With many a smile and thanks, the victim hung her cloak up, and went to the sideboard.

Quick as thought, Mrs. Blandford slipped off a diamond bracelet, and placed it in the pocket of the cloak.

"I won't disrobe just now," she said. "Take a seat, and let's have a chat."

Nowise loth, Susan obeyed; and after a few preliminaries, Mrs. Blandford said, "By the way, where were my niece and her baby buried? I want to put a head-stone up, to mark the spot."

And she looked steadily at Susan Prat, to see if she winced at the question.

In nowise discomposed, she replied, "I can't tell you just now, madam, but I'll find out."

"Oh, of course. Thank you. You are sure she is dead?"

"Quite. You saw a copy of the doctor's certificate."

"I know I did; but I have been dreaming of her lately, and seem to think that she is still alive."

"Dreams ain't of no consequence, madam; they won't bring people to life again."

"Of course not! It's silly of me to indulge in such fancies, Susan, so we'll let that pass. The child is dead, too, eh?"

"Dead as dead can be!" said Susan. "But it makes me nervous to talk of such things. I try to forget them."

"Let me help you to some more brandy; it will do you good. Don't say no."

"Well, marm, just a wee drop more; sperits agrees with me, as I has spasms in the chest which keeps me from going to sleep, and makes me see awful visions. I sees her a-following me in the streets at dark, and she's always at my bedside; but, bless you, them's mere fancies and vapors, in fact, like thin air. In my opinion, there ain't such things as ghosts."

Susan Prat became garrulous over her brandy, and Mrs. Blandford got rid of her as quickly as possible by saying, "You can go into the kitchen and have some supper, Susan. Good-night; much thanks for calling."

Susan Prat put on her cloak, and with deep courtesies, retired.

After the lapse of ten minutes Mrs. Blandford rung for her maid, and asked her to search for a diamond bracelet; adding, "I took it off while Susan Prat was here, and must have mislaid it. Has she gone?"

"No, my lady; she is down-stairs."

The search for the bracelet proved fruitless, of course.

"This is a serious affair," said Mrs. Blandford. "I have no alternative but to have Susan Prat searched. Tell Thomas to send for a policeman, but on no account must you say a word about what has happened to anybody."

When her maid left, she swept majestically down-stairs into the drawing-room, secretly exulting over the success of her foul plot.

She saw the policeman in the ante-room, and told him of her loss; adding, "I don't accuse this person of theft. If she is innocent, no harm will have been done; but it is clear that the bracelet could not have disappeared without somebody having taken it. I believe she is now down-stairs at the present moment."

Accompanied by Thomas, the guardian of the law descended into the lower regions, and after saluting, said, very artfully, "The lady up-stairs has missed something, and wishes me to search you all. If you have no objection I will commence with the lady in the cloak there!"—pointing to Susan Prat.

"Oh, search me and welcome!" she said, with a laugh; "I'm no thief!"

She stood up, and to her horror, and the

amazement of all present, he produced the missing bracelet.

"You must come up-stairs with me!" he said, clutching her by the arm.

Speechless with terror, she was led away among sundry shrugs of the shoulder, elevation of the eyebrows, and exclamations of "Well, I never!" "Who'd have thought it?" and found herself in Mrs. Blandford's presence.

In vain she protested her innocence. She was formally charged, and placed in the police cells.

Thomas Sutton, as we shall still call him, thought deeply over the matter, and came to a conclusion, which, however, he wisely kept to himself.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATEFUL MEETING.

WHEN Dora left her aunt's she was richer by ten dollars than when she entered there.

Thomas Sutton's kindness, so unexpected and so generous, made her heart dance with joy, not because of the money, though in her needy circumstances she did not despise this, but because it showed her that there were still people in the world who had hearts that could feel for the desolate and oppressed.

Gladness seemed to change the whole appearance of things; to brighten up the dingy by-streets and stores, and to make even the most common objects beautiful.

She wanted food; so going into a respectable eating-house, she gave a modest order.

At an opposite table sat a gentlemanly looking youth, who eyed her with respectful curiosity, wondering greatly why such a beautiful and modest-looking girl should be so poorly clad.

His interest in her increased when he perceived how she ate and drank, which she did with all the grace and ease imparted only by good breeding.

The meal ended, she gave the waiter a bill, and waited patiently for the change; but the fellow seemed in no hurry to give it to her.

Raising his hat, and approaching her, the young gentleman asked, politely, "Can I be of service to you? I am afraid the waiter has forgotten your change; you gave him two dollars, I believe!"

"Yes," she modestly replied.

Turning round, he called the waiter, and said, sharply, "You have forgotten this lady's change!"

"Change?" said the fellow, insolently. "Lady, indeed! the likes of her has no business here!"

"Silence, fellow! You are impertinent, and I will not permit it! I saw this lady give you a bill. Send the proprietor to me!"

The waiter hesitated, and then went away to do his bidding.

"Oh," said Dora, tremulously, "pray do not take any trouble on my account. I did give him two dollars, but it doesn't matter; I will go without the change."

"Allow me to conduct this matter for you," he said, kindly. "I should be unworthy of respect if I allowed you to be imposed upon."

The proprietor now came upon the scene, when the gentleman gave him his card, and explained the matter to him, at the same time complaining of the waiter's rudeness.

Dora received her change, and an apology, and then left the place.

She did not know how to reach the ferry, and was on the point of inquiring of a policeman, when the gentleman who had befriended her came up, and, saluting her, asked if he could be of any further service.

He was so kind, and looked so unmistakably the gentleman, that she unhesitatingly told him where she wished to go.

"I shall cross over to Brooklyn," he said; "and, with your permission, will see you safely home."

She consented gladly, as he would protect her against insult.

On their way to an omnibus they passed the

waiter, who smiled derisively, and muttered something which they did not overhear.

How strangely perverse is human nature, which will not pay respect or deference to virtue and modesty in the person of one meanly clad!

Vice may flaunt itself in silks and satins, and pass unheeded; but true modesty in shabby attire is unrecognizable, and is condemned without a hearing.

He crossed the ferry with her, saw her to Mary Frost's door, and bade her good-night as courteously as if she had been a lady of rank and fashion.

She knocked timidly at the door, fearful lest she had come to the wrong address; but when it was opened by Mary herself, and she was warmly welcomed, all her fears banished.

"I am so pleased to see you," said Mary. "Sit you down; supper's ready. And as soon as my good man comes in—it's his turn out to-night—we will begin."

Dora took off her shawl and bonnet, tidied herself, and then turning to her friend, said:

"Where are the children? I should so like to see them."

"They're in bed, but you can see them if you like. This way!"

Taking up a candle, she led the way into the back bedroom, where three rosy, chubby-faced children lay asleep.

"And now come into the other room and see the baby," said Mary, as she led the way.

"He is such a darling, and grows every day more like—neither of us. I am sure the fairies must have changed him."

Dora saw a beautiful little boy, and stooping down, kissed him repeatedly, while the tears chased each other down her cheeks, and fell like rain-drops on the sleeper's cherub-like features.

"He is indeed beautiful," she murmured. "It is silly of me to cry. You will forgive me, won't you?"

"I can understand all," said Mary, kissing her. "You are thinking of your poor little darling that's gone!"

They went into the living room together, and found John Frost there.

He had an honest, open countenance, and Dora quite took to him on the spot.

They sat and chatted, and found Dora a delightful companion; and she in her turn had not felt so happy for many a month. This was a red letter day in the calendar of her life, which lately had been all black, with nothing but clouds on the horizon.

She was up betimes in the morning, making herself useful among the children, with whom she had become a great favorite; and in helping Mary, who was able to go out with her husband, to turn an honest penny, as she termed it.

No greater proof of the vicissitudes which Dora passed through could have been given than in the contentment which now possessed her.

Reared in the lap of luxury, and educated to shine in society, she yet found peace and rest in this humble home.

Mindful of her promise, Dora wrote to her aunt to let her know of her address, for the promised allowance was of great importance to her, especially as she did not intend to be a burden on her kind friends.

From her scanty store she purchased a few articles of clothing indispensably necessary to her comfort.

One day, during her friend's absence from home, she was surprised at seeing a carriage draw up at the door, and a fashionably-attired lady step from it.

She admitted her, and although much adverse to converse about herself, was obliged courteously to answer several questions of a personal character.

But all this was done so kindly and with such tact that she could not feel offended.

The visitor promised to call again with presents of clothing for the children, and some books for Dora's own reading.

Hardly had the lady gone than honest Thomas Sutton paid her a visit.

She was truly pleased to see him, for she had a grateful recollection of his kindness.

He was dressed in gorgeous livery, and had been the admiration of a party of small boys, who were unused to see a gentleman of his splendor taking his walks abroad in their neighborhood.

They escorted him to the very door, and cheered him to the echo when he threw them a handful of coppers to scramble for.

Mary's children hurried away affrighted at so much magnificence, and peeped timidly at him from time to time, as if doubtful whether he was a being of this world.

He took his seat, with great care, on one of the rickety chairs, and said, "My—I mean, your aunt has sent me with the money; here it is"—handing her a sealed envelope.

"Thank you very much; you are very kind. Will you be good enough to convey my thanks to your mistress for her great kindness to a poor girl."

He turned his head aside, lest she should see the wry face which he made, for the extent of her kindness amounted to three dollars, which he had supplemented with five.

"Ah, yes; she is kind, isn't she? Wouldn't she make a good wife?—I beg pardon! I mean a good grandmother; no, that isn't it—I don't know what I do mean."

She smiled at his confusion, and said, "My thanks are due to you, too, Mr.—"

"Thomas Sutton, at your service, miss—I mean, madam. I have ventured to take the liberty of bringing a few things—will you accept them? You said said I might be your friend; you know it would be such an honor."

He handed her a goodly-sized basket, and looked as sheepish as if he had been a lover on the eve of making a declaration.

It contained all sorts of nice things—grapes, cakes, jellies, and a bottle of port wine.

She made him some tea, and the children, growing less timid, gathered round the table to partake of the good cheer.

He left, having dispensed joy and gladness to many hearts, but to none more than to Dora's.

The same party of ragged little urchins escorted him on his way home, and he only got rid of them by turning into the first confectioner's shop he met and treating them all round.

CHAPTER VII.

"HEADS, I WIN; TAILS, YOU LOSE."

A YOUNG man, shabby and travel-stained, stood before the mansion in Madison Square the morning after the events recorded in the preceding chapter.

It would have puzzled the beholder to guess, with any degree of certainty, the age of the individual in question.

He might have been twenty or thirty, according to the mood he was in.

His real age was twenty-two, but as he lounged on the opposite sidewalk and surveyed Mrs. Blandford's house, he might have been taken for thirty.

His face was drawn and puckered, and deep black lines underlaid his eyes, which were half-closed, as if he were in deep meditation on some important step of his life.

His hat, a slouched one, had seen some wear, his dress was threadbare, his boots patched, but he wore an abundance of collar and wristbands which were scrupulously clean.

His hair was cut very short, and altogether he looked a kind of man you would not care to meet on a dark night or in a lonely spot, especially when you saw the thin, compressed lips, the massive under-jaw, the short, thick-set neck, and the lurking air of ferocity and cunning, all of which stamped him as one who, when passions of cupidity and revenge were aroused, would not stick at trifles.

"To be, or not to be—that's the question!" he soliloquized, quoting the words of the im-

mortal bard. After a pause, he continued: "This coin shall decide; heads, I win—women, I lose. Egad! I have generally lost in that quarter. Here goes—a man or a mouse! I may be dining with the she-wolf to-day, or be on the lookout for an unwary pedestrian to-night."

The coin spun in the air, and he caught it in his outstretched palm.

"Heads, by Jove! Here goes! If the worst comes to the worst, and she won't give me any coin, I may be able to borrow a brooch, a ring, or a few tablespoons to deposit with my uncle, with whom I have done a good deal of business."

Sauntering across the street, and meeting a poor little beggar boy, ragged, dirty, and forlorn, who was trying in a quavering voice to sing the first verse of "In the Gloaming," he threw him a penny—the only coin he had in the world—and ascended the broad flight of steps.

He laughed at the stone lions, and said, jestingly, as he patted one of them on the head, "Hilloa, you caricatures of Landseer, how is the she dragon? Her heart is as stony as yours, which is a bad job for me, especially as I want to reach her pocket."

He looked at the knocker, then at the bell, as if undecided which to use. Giving the latter a sharp pull, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and standing astride, awaited the opening of the door.

Our friend Thomas Sutton opened it, and looked at him in silence.

"I hope you are quite well?" said the stranger, offering his hand. "You have grown stouter since I saw you last; but your general appearance has improved, I must say."

"I don't shake hands with my inferiors, young man," said Thomas, folding his arms over his broad chest, and leaning against the door. "Are you a hartist?"

The stranger smiled grimly, and said, "Not exactly, although I have spoiled a few figure-heads in my day."

"Oh, ah, I see you're a carver!"

"I'd like to be at the present moment, for, between you and I and the gate-post, I feel precious hungry, and could do justice to a joint."

"If you apply at the harea," said Thomas, pompously, pointing below, "you can have some broken victuals."

"Throw in a pint of beer, and I don't mind. Won't you join me, old fellow? I like to dine with gentlemen's gentlemen, you know. I was in your line once myself; I was footman, barber, and Chief Secretary of State to the Governor General of Elephants, in the Canary islands; and didn't we keep a fine table! We had roast kangaroo, camels' humps, and other delicacies; but I will tell you more about it when I see you presently. Ta, ta!"

"What might your name be?" said Thomas.

"Of course, a natural question. Everybody ought to have a name, oughtn't they now? I have had so many that I don't know which to choose for the moment. However, Bob Blandford will do as well as any."

"Why, that's the missus's name!"

"You mean your wife's?"

Thomas nodded; then, fearful of the mistake he had made, said, with some confusion. "My name is Sutton; the lady of this house is named Blandford. Here's my card at your service."

His cigar-case dropped out, when Bob Blandford coolly picked it up, and helped himself, saying, "I don't mind if I do, old fellow. Have one? No? Too early for you, I suppose; then I'll take another for you."

Our friend Thomas was rather amused than otherwise at the fellow's cool impudence, and resolved to see more of him, especially as he had a project in view, and Bob Blandford was, in his opinion, the very man to help him in carrying it out.

So he joined him in his own sanctum, and had a long chat with him, lent him money until his remittances arrived from abroad, and

thought him one of the nicest fellows he had ever met.

They were looking out of the window, when Bob Blandford stepped back with an oath, and cannoned against his newly-made friend.

It was a significant fact that Pinkerton, the famous New York detective, passed by at the moment.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BENEFACTRESS.

LIFE went smoothly with Dora Merton at the home of the Frosts, each day bringing with it increased peace and contentment, notwithstanding her homely surroundings.

The baby was a constant source of pleasure to her. No mother could have been more watchful or attentive, and she loved to imagine she could trace in its infantine features the lineaments of her missing husband.

She struggled against conviction that he had deserted her, and many were the bitter tears she shed at the mere thought of his unkindness.

She had often called at Madame Josephine's to ask if there was a letter for her, or if any inquiries had been made.

But the invariable answer was, "No."

Her pride would not permit her to leave her own address, for she had occupied the position of a lady in the establishment, and shrunk from an avowal of her present humble circumstances.

She was not ashamed of her humble dwelling, which was the only one whose doors had been open to her in her distress; but she knew the world's estimate of poverty, and therefore kept the matter a secret.

She was always sad when she returned from these journeys; and it was on such an occasion that the lady—a Mrs. Tyrrel—who visited her on a previous occasion called again, and offered the position of companion in her household. A thrill of delight ran through the girl's frame. It quickened every pulse, every sense; for the offer would reinstate her in her former respectable position, and enable her to dispense with her aunt's alms, for in no other light could she view her weekly allowance.

"There is no rose without a thorn," as the poet sings; and Dora, notwithstanding her present joy, felt a sharp pang of regret at having to part with her kind friends, who of all the world had alone stretched out a helping hand to her in her dire extremity.

How could she forget that terrible day when, weak and ill, and sick of life, and with the east wind searching her weary frame, she stood on the Brooklyn Bridge contemplating suicide?

Then Mary Frost's beaming face shone on her like an angel's, and saved her from death, as, but for her timely assistance, she must have joined that great army that has gone before.

It consoled her to know that she would be in a position to help her friends even more than at present; so she gladly accepted the offer, and the matter was settled.

After taking leave of the household, and kissing the baby rapturously, she was driven to her new abode at Ravenswood, where on the banks of the Sound the Tyrrels resided in a mansion which stood in its own grounds.

The carriage swept along the drive, past magnificent shrubberies, to the hall door.

Dora was ushered in, and received a kindly welcome from Mrs. Tyrrel, who took her at once to her rooms.

"I hope you will be very happy with us, Dora," she said. "We are only two in family—myself and my son Gerald, who will be home presently. To-day you will be my guest. It will be our pleasure to entertain you. To-morrow we shall settle down into our everyday life; and now that we have some time to ourselves, let me ask you to confide in me always as you would your mother."

This was what Dora yearned for—a sympathizing heart to tell her sad story to, and ask

for advice, which was sorely needed in her perplexing condition.

She was a wife, yet not a wife. Her husband might be dead. A mother, yet childless, and without a single relative to whom she could turn for guidance or support.

So, with Mrs. Tyrrel's arm embracing her, and the soft April breezes fanning her cheeks and toying with her rich, dark tresses, she told the history of her sad young life, withholding nothing but the name of her husband.

"Let us hope that a bright future is before you. It is darkest ever before the dawn; and the blackest clouds have a silvery lining. Tempest-tossed, and almost wrecked, a kind fortune has shaped your path for you, and given you to me, at last, as a dear companion, and, let me hope, as a daughter."

"I shall always endeavor to be worthy of your affection."

"I am quite sure of that," said Mrs. Tyrrel; "and now it is time to dress for dinner, or we shall have my dear boy home before we are ready for him."

A delightful surprise was in store for Dora, who found in her bedroom many beautiful articles necessary to her altered position; a dressing-case, fitted with every requisite for the toilet; dainty cut bottles, filled with rare perfumes; ivory-backed brushes, and a box of delicate and fine handkerchiefs; another, filled with gloves of every tint; these were on her dressing-table.

Her wardrobe contained many articles of clothing which she herself could not have provided out of her scanty means.

Tears were in her eyes, but they were tears of deep gratitude; and a quiet rest and peace crept into her young heart, and nestled there like doves.

She was aroused from this pleasing reverie by a tap at the door, and a smart maid entered with a tray, on which was a cup of fragrant tea and light refreshment, a convincing proof of Mrs. Tyrrel's kind thoughtfulness for her protegee's comfort.

The maid offered to assist her to dress; but Dora declined in a gentle tone, as she did not wish the humble contents of her box to be seen.

Thanks to the knowledge of the art of dress-making gained at Madame Josephine's, she had been enabled to provide herself with a few dresses of cheap materials, which, owing to her skill, looked as if they had passed through the hands of a fashionable milliner.

From her scanty wardrobe she selected a black grenadine, charmingly trimmed with cheap cream lace and satin bows.

Her magnificent hair needed not the practiced hand of a maid to make it look beautiful. It was twisted and coiled round her shapely head, and adorned with a single rose, a Glory of Dijon, the tints of which contrasted with the sable hue of her tresses.

A sculptor would have been enraptured with the perfect outlines of her neck, bust and rounded arms, which shone like satin.

Arrayed simply, and in all the freshness and bloom of her youth and beauty, she descended and joined Mrs. Tyrrel in the drawing-room.

Could this be the girl she had met in a humble tenement?—could that radiant face ever have looked sad and wistful, and that voluptuous form been meanly clad? These were the thoughts which spoke from out Mrs. Tyrrel's eyes as she looked at Dora, but to which she was too well bred to give utterance.

Kissing her, she said, with charming frankness, "My dear, you are indeed lovely!"

Dora blushed prettily, and wished in her heart that some one else—her husband—had been there to compliment her.

"You play, do you not, Dora? You will find that a good instrument—one of the best. I am so fond of music! Have you any favorite pieces? You will find a choice selection."

Seating herself at the piano, one of Weber's grands, she played a reverie from Beethoven.

Under her touch the instrument seemed to speak. Grand chords swept majestically along like the triumphal march of a victorious army,

to be followed by the plaintive wailings of a soul in agony, the music changing from joy to sadness, like the checkered face of an April sky.

Dora's soul seemed to drink in the glorious sounds; and, insensibly, she burst forth into song—"The king of my heart is coming."

A gentleman entered with noiseless tread, and stood listening with rapt expression to the beautiful songstress, wondering much who she was, and how she came to be his mother's guest.

"Oh, Gerald," said Mrs. Tyrrel, "I am so glad you have come! Allow me to introduce you to my friend Miss Dora Merton."

The introduction over, the conversation became general, and as dinner was not yet announced, Gerald did all in his power to entertain their guest.

Dora had given an imperceptible start, not of guilt, but of surprise, upon seeing Gerald, whom she instantly recognized as the gentleman who had befriended her.

It was not such an easy task for him to see in her the girl who was indebted to him for her present position.

The features were the same, but the framing was so different. She looked the lady now; formerly, he had thought her one.

Her image had haunted him in his sleep, and he knew instinctively that hers was a sad history, and sympathized with her.

He had interested his mother in the Frost family, knowing well that her kind heart would be touched by the sight of the beauty, gentleness, modesty and poverty of Dora.

His generous scheme had succeeded well, and he had the satisfaction of seeing a bright young life rescued from possible degradation.

He sat near her as they turned over the leaves of the album together, and felt an exquisite thrill of delight when his fingers touched hers.

Without being aware of it, he loved this friendless girl who had fallen across his path in life most mysteriously.

Hitherto he had not known what it was to love deeply and passionately, although he was the affianced husband of Edith Markham, his cousin, who had loved him dearly ever since they had roamed the woods and fields together as boy and girl.

"Are you ill, Miss Merton?" he suddenly exclaimed on noticing how agitated she became.

"Thanks, no!" she murmured, faintly. "I am far from strong, and have been subject of late to feelings of faintness."

She was looking at the photograph of a handsome man—her own husband, or else some one who resembled him very closely.

"That is my cousin," Gerald remarked; "have you ever met him? Pardon me the question, but the sight of a well-known face often affects us."

Mrs. Tyrrel, without betraying herself, listened eagerly for her reply.

"There are countenances so much alike," said Dora. "that we are sometimes deceived into a belief of their identity."

Luckily for Dora, the dinner-bell rung, and Gerald led her in to dinner.

CHAPTER IX.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

SUSAN PRAT, in her cell, chafed under the injustice with which she had been treated by one for whom she had risked not only liberty, but life itself.

She firmly believed that Dora was dead as she had given up her position of nurse immediately after that supposed event, hence she could not understand why it was Mrs. Blandford should have treated her so badly.

She knew the child was living, and in this fact lay her safety, for she shrewdly suspected that her employer would not have been so anxious for its death, without full and sufficient reason.

If Mrs. Blandford dared to appear against her, she must take the consequences of dis-

closures which for both of them had better remain buried in oblivion.

So she wrote a letter to her, and bribed a policeman to carry it to the address.

The contents of the letter were as follows:

"Susan Prat is not spiteful, although she has every reason to be so, especially as she has been unjustly accused of theft, which Mrs. Blandford cannot deny. The child of Dora Merton still lives and thrives. Susan Prat is well aware that certain interests are bound up in this child, and that Mrs. Blandford would not care to have it produced, especially as property is involved in question."

This cunningly concocted epistle duly reached Mrs. Blandford, to whom its contents gave great concern.

Moreover, her troubles were increasing. Dora had disappeared from her address, and left no trace—at least, the Frosts would not give any information concerning her.

She had found a note on the dressing-table from her step-son, Robert Blandford, asking for money, and threatening to make disclosures of an unpleasant nature if she refused.

Her husband, too, was becoming more unmanageable daily, and wanted the marriage to be made public.

And on the top of all these vexatious troubles came this communication from Susan Prat, who had evidently gained from some quarter or another information of a serious character.

It behooved her, therefore, to be careful how she acted toward one who could, and evidently would, if she were not cautious, do her a mischief.

She had much better make a friend of her, for a clever, unscrupulous associate was what she needed in her present difficulties, which were of no ordinary character.

So she instructed her solicitor to withdraw the charge against Susan Prat, who was accordingly released.

Her next difficulty was how to deal with her husband and step-son, who were likely to prove more than troublesome.

No more galling yoke could have been put upon a proud woman than that she now wore.

Suitors by the dozen had asked for her hand in marriage—needy men most of them—who were willing to sell themselves at Mammon's shrine.

But she had been too ambitious to fall into such a snare. She wanted youth and riches, but there was not the slightest chance of her wish being gratified.

"May and December," may, and do, unite in the bonds of holy wedlock; but it rarely happens that a sprig of blue blood, young, and hopeful of the future, is willing to throw his title at the feet of a rich widow old enough to be his grandmother.

There is no rule without an exception, as proved by a recent marriage which has excited attention.

It was all the more galling that she should through fear have made the fearful mistake of marrying her footman, who did not prove so tractable as she had expected.

She was about to give a grand dinner party, and deferred the consideration of her future policy toward her husband and step-son until that event had come off.

A peculiar smile played about the mouth of Thomas Sutton, and he frequently broke into hearty and unexplained laughter when alone.

Poor fellow! honest as the day, and without guile, he little knew that he stood on the brink of a precipice over which he might be hurled by foul treachery at any moment.

The eventful night came, and found the guests assembled.

The mansion was ablaze with lights, and the silver and gold plate and costly glass glittered on the tables, which contained rare flowers and exotics, the wealthy hostess having spared no expense to make the affair a success.

The resources of her establishment had been supplemented by the culinary skill of the famous Delmonico, and everything promised to go as "merry as a marriage bell."

Carriages rolled up to the door in quick suc-

cession, and deposited their human freight of ladies and gentlemen—well-dressed, scented, and jeweled—to the admiration of a large crowd.

There was a buzz of conversation in the drawing-rooms, and the silvery laugh of beautiful women rung out like the chimes of fairy bells.

Mrs. Blandford, arrayed in costly jewels and rare velvet and lace, did the honors of the occasion with the air of a well-bred lady of fashion.

The guests were seated, when a servant announced the arrival of another and unexpected visitor—Mr. Thomas Sutton.

Our friend, arrayed in a well-fitting dress suit, and with diamond studs and links in his spotless linen, and a valuable emerald ring on his finger, sauntered in with the air of a swell of the first water, and after bowing to the hostess, and taking a general survey of the table, seated himself close to her, in a chair which had been reserved for a favorite guest.

It was lucky for her that she was in the habit of keeping her feelings well under control, otherwise there would have been a scene.

She merely bowed to him, and the dinner proceeded.

Bob Blandford, who had acted as Sutton's deputy, now appeared on the scene as a waiter, and paid particular attention to his friend's wants, which brought him prominently before his step-mother's eyes, which flashed fire at this double insult to her.

Banquo's ghost at the banquet could not have been a more unwelcome sight to Macbeth than was the presence of these two to the hostess.

Thomas drank more wine than was good for him at an early stage of the dinner, and became talkative and assertive in his words and actions.

"This is from bin nineteen, my dear Mrs. Blandford," he said, with a flushed visage, holding up the glass critically; "and a very good sound wine it is. I don't mind if I do have another glass, Bob."

This was too much for her feelings; and as he sat close to her, she attempted to admonish him to be on his good behavior by kicking his legs, but unfortunately her satined foot came into contact with the shins of a learned judge, who, with a grimace, said, "Can I be of any service to you, madam?"

"Allow me to take wine with you," she replied, nervously, wishing the guests, and her husband in particular, at the deuce.

"I shall have great pleasure," said Thomas and the judge in concert, to her great mortification.

That learned judge never quite understood why Mrs. Blandford had been so familiar as to not press his toe, but to vigorously kick his shin. He mentally resolved to decline all future invitations from such a quarter.

Thomas, who knew him by sight very well, would insist on arguing the question of private hexecutions, as he termed them, with him, and stuck to his point with bull-dog tenacity.

Perceiving that one of the waiters was not serving to his satisfaction, he pulled Bob Blandford's sleeve, and said, in a loud whisper: "Tell that idiot of a Jim to mind what he's about, or I'll turn him out!"

Mrs. Blandford was to be pitied, for her feelings—which, to do her justice, were those of a lady—were lacerated to the highest degree, for she must be blind indeed if she had not noticed the looks of astonishment and suppressed titters which every blunder of her husband elicited.

He was having his revenge now; hers was to come.

She breathed more freely when she gave the signal for the ladies to retire; and the gentlemen were left alone to sip their wine and chat.

Our friend Thomas was the admired of all; and several youthful wags, who enjoyed the fun of seeing a vulgar fellow seated with them at table, drew him out to their heart's con-

tent, and insisted upon his taking wine with them.

His laugh was the loudest when any witticism went the round of the table, and he constantly nudged the learned judge with his elbow to show his appreciation, and to wake him up, as he thought him "rather slow."

The gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing room, when music and cards helped to while away the hours.

The irrepressible Thomas was everywhere; at the card-tables, the piano, and in superintending the waiters; in fact, he thought himself a very agreeable, useful fellow, and was determined that the affair should go off with splendor, so far as he himself was concerned.

Whenever any song or piece of music pleased him, he clapped his hands, and shouted, "Bravo! encore!" and at the suggestion of a wag, accompanied a nervous, elderly lady to the piano, and spoiled her performance by turning over in the wrong place, which was to be expected, as he did not understand a note of music.

The feelings of his wretched wife can be better imagined than described; but she proved herself equal to the occasion by circulating a report that he had come into a large fortune, and she had tried the experiment of introducing him into polite society, but would not repeat it.

The gloss of wealth smoothed away his vulgarities, which were termed "eccentricities," and several old gentlemen and dowagers, whose love of cards was a passion, invited him to join their set, but he was too excited to sit down quietly anywhere.

The wag of the company artfully suggested to him that he should sing, offering to accompany him on the piano.

Nothing loth, and anxious to display his vocal powers, which were of no mean order so far as strength of lung was concerned, he consented, and commenced "The Mulligan Guards," amid suppressed laughter, which broke into an open roar when, at the end of the first verse, with every sense of self-satisfaction, he called upon the company to join in the chorus.

When the guests dispersed, Thomas Sutton was sleeping the sleep of the just; his wife was in strong hysterics, and Bob Blandford was "making hay while the sun shone," in more ways than one.

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN OF THE WANDERER.

It was a lovely moonlight night in the month of May, when a pedestrian above the middle height, and as handsome as an Adonis, made his way along a shady lane where the scent of apple-blossoms and wild roses stole upon the senses imperceptibly.

The hum of insect life was not quite hushed into repose, and the squirrels rustled the branches as they climbed nimbly from bough to bough.

The ripple of a brooklet which sleeps neither by day nor by night gave forth its cadence, musical, albeit monotonous, as it wended its way toward its outlet.

The traveler at this early hour could not surely expect to be a welcome guest at yonder mansion nestling among the trees.

Nor did he expect to be, although he was the heir not only to that estate, but to others of greater magnitude.

He was Douglas Markham, son of Edward Markham, and the husband of Dora Merton.

He had incurred his father's displeasure by refusing the hand of a rich heiress, whose lands and wealth would have swollen the worldly possessions of the family.

But Douglas had seen and loved Dora, for whom he was ready to sacrifice wealth and station, and whom he married secretly, thus making the breach between his father and himself wider still.

He had gone abroad in the hopes of earning a livelihood through the influence of friends, and had succeeded in part.

He had transmitted various sums of money to an old school-fellow, whom he thought a trusty friend, for his wife's subsistence, but who had played him false and betrayed him to his father.

Dora's silence, so unaccountable and painful, could be borne by him no longer, so he threw up his appointment, and came back to the land of his birth in the hope of solving the mystery.

He called at Madame Josephine's, and to his great dismay found that Dora had been there, asking for letters, looking ill, and evidently very poor. This was all the information they could give him, for she had left no address, and had not been near the place for several weeks.

The friend who had so miserably betrayed his trust, had left the East, and was not expected to return for some considerable time.

Where to find her, or how to act, he knew not. One might be seeking forever, in the huge metropolis of New York, without finding the object sought for.

He resolved to try the effect of advertising in the daily papers, but that failed also.

Driven to his wit's end, he resolved to revisit the scenes of his childhood, thinking the sight might revive his drooping spirits and give him fresh courage.

On reaching the gates he did not enter, but skirting the grounds, made his way through a wood in the direction of the gardener's cottage, which looked very picturesque in the moonlight.

There was a light in the window, and he could see a woman's form flitting to and fro.

He knocked, and the door was opened by the man's sister.

"Well, Cissy," he said, "how have you and your brother been all this while—well, I hope?"

"This is indeed a surprise, Mr. Douglas, won't you come in? I expect my brother every moment."

"Thanks, I will," he replied, as he bowed his head and entered the room in which the table was laid for supper.

Douglas Markham had been very fond of Cissy in the past—too fond, the brother thought for her peace of mind; but he was an honorable man, and would have scorned to take advantage of her preference for him to further any base ends.

It was only a harmless flirtation just to while away an idle hour with a very pretty girl, but one much beneath him in station.

There was a sad, wistful look about the girl, and her eyes filled with tears as she sat opposite him, which made him think of his own dearly loved wife, and of her many heartaches and of the tears she must have shed over his seemingly cruel desertion.

Taking her hand, he said, gently: "Something troubles you, Cissy. Won't you tell me what it is? Is John unkind to you? If so, he had better mend his ways, or he will be no longer foster-brother of mine."

Before she could answer, the door opened, and John Clayton entered.

"Have you no welcome for me?" asked Douglas, perceiving that he held aloof from his proffered hand.

"Do you deserve one?" was the rough answer.

"Why, what have I done? Have you, too, turned against me, because I have quarreled with my father—you, my own foster-brother?"

"Don't wrong me, Mr. Douglas. Heaven knows I could lay down my life for you; but there are some things which I cannot forgive even a brother. My family for generations has served yours faithfully and well, and never a stain has rested upon us. My sister's honor is dear to me, and I would slay the man who robbed her of it—ay, were he a prince!"

"Hush, John!" said Cissy, in a voice of terror. "He is innocent."

"If he is innocent, who, then, is guilty?"

She hung her head in shame and confusion.

"John Clayton," said Douglas, quietly, "if you were my equal, I would make you retract

the bitter insult you have put upon me; as it is, I can be your friend no longer. Good-night!"

"Oh, stay, sir," said Cissy, imploringly, "and I will confess all, although my heart may break with shame and sorrow."

Douglas went over to her side and drew her arm through his to support her, saying, with a gentle tenderness:

"Dear Cissy, I am sure you have been more sinned against than sinning."

"Don't tell me, sister," said John Clayton, in a voice husky with emotion. "Mr. Douglas, my more than brother, I beg your pardon humbly. Here is my gun; take it and shoot me."

"No, John, I will not take your life, but I will your hand."

They shook hands. Leaning his head against the door, John Clayton burst into a flood of tears such as only strong men shed in the dark hour of their soul's agony.

Cissy knelt at his feet, and begged him to forgive her, and she would tell him all another time.

To distract his grief, Douglas plied him with questions about the inmates of the mansion, and all three were soon seated at the supper-table, discussing substantial fare, which was very welcome to Douglas after his long walk, when a knock came to the door, and an under gardener entered; but, being a new man, he did not recognize Douglas, much to his relief.

"Sneak thieves are out," he said. "I have come to tell you."

Clayton started up and seized his gun, when Douglas drew him aside, and whispered:

"Do not say who I am. I want to accompany you; it won't be the first time, John."

John consented, and after a draught of good old ale, they sallied forth, fully armed, to trap the evil-doers.

Douglas liked the excitement, and was eager for the fray. It was a change from the humdrum life he had been leading of late.

The trio crept softly through the undergrowth, careful lest the snapping of a twig should betray their approach.

It was a glorious night; the moonbeams bathed everything in a bath of burnished silver, making even the commonest object look beautiful.

"There they are!" Clayton whispered, pointing to several dark objects. "If we move round to the left, we shall take them unawares."

He guided, and they followed, and when near enough, dashed out upon the poachers, who, although taken by surprise, made a desperate resistance, blows being freely given and received on either side, but no firearms being used as yet.

Douglas collared a man of his own size and weight, and they wrestled for it, swaying to and fro, like sturdy elms in a high wind.

Douglas was thrown, and at the other's mercy, and the man snatching up his gun, was in the act of dealing him a blow with the butt, when John knocked him senseless.

Douglas was now free to aid his companions in beating off the others, who, fearing capture, took to their heels, and escaped.

Taking some cord from his pocket, Clayton, after having brought the fellow to by administering some brandy from his flask, tied his hands behind him, and led him off in the direction of the cottage.

Arrived there, the gardener was dispatched for the police, into whose custody the prisoner was to be given.

Cissy came out, and congratulated her brother and Douglas on their safe return, as she had good reason to do, for such affrays as they had been engaged in not frequently terminated fatally.

"But who is this you have here?" she asked. The prisoner turned his head toward her full in the moonlight.

She started convulsively, and shrieked, "Robert, my husband!" then fell senseless at his feet.

CHAPTER XI.

DANGEROUS FRIENDSHIP.

DORA MERTON, as we shall still call her, found her cup of happiness full to the brim in the peaceful surroundings of her new home, for such it was in the strictest sense of the word.

Shut out from the busy world, its cares and pleasures, it was indeed a haven of rest to one who, like herself, had passed through many vicissitudes.

The house and grounds were simply delightful, with the avenues of stately trees, the flowers, fruit-blossoms and shrubberies.

There was a conservatory, also filled with the choicest exotics, and climbing overhead were sturdy vines, which gave promise of an abundant crop of luscious grapes.

A spacious lawn led to a fish-pond, in which many of the finny tribe disported themselves, some being so tame as to eat from the hand.

Peacocks and peahens strutted about in all the splendor of their gaudy plumage, looking superbly beautiful in the sunlight.

Doves and pigeons flew in and out of their cotes, making the place cheerful with their soft music.

She often accompanied Mrs. Tyrrel in her carriage to visit the poor and sick, among whom was included the Frost family, who, as may be supposed, were pleased to see her.

Of course, she saw a great deal of Gerald, with whom she passed many delightful hours, without once forgetting her absent husband or her obligations as a wife.

At heart and soul she was as pure as snow.

Gerald recognized this, and respected her for it, although he hungered for one word from her rosy lips to satisfy his love.

It was impossible that she could be blind to the admiration which he expressed for her in his every look, and this made her more guarded in her conduct toward him.

He had seen the wedding-ring on her finger, badge of her honor, but knew not whether she was wife or widow; etiquette forbade his asking the question, nor had his mother touched upon the subject.

One day, never to be forgotten by her for its misery and anguish, she received a letter, upon reading which she burst into a flood of tears.

It announced the death of her husband abroad, and inclosed were twenty-five dollars, all he could leave her.

She showed the letter to Mrs. Tyrrel, who tried by every means in her power to comfort and console her, but in vain.

The letter was so circumstantial in its details as to leave no doubt as to the fact itself.

Her husband had met with a fatal accident, and had only time to tell his friend her maiden name, and the name of her aunt, before he expired.

This was, indeed, desolation; bereft of husband and child, she could gladly have died and buried her sorrows in the grave.

Gerald heard of the matter on his return home, and though touched by her grief, was glad at heart to know that she was free.

His mother had never denied him anything that could add to his happiness, and he hoped to gain her consent to his union with Dora, notwithstanding he was already engaged to his cousin Edith.

"The course of true love never does run smooth," we know, and the present case was an exemplification of it, as he would find in the end, most likely.

But he did not despair; hope, that sheet-anchor of man's life, buoyed him up.

No brother could have been more attentive than he, and his mother encouraged him in this, for she loved the beautiful girl more dearly every day.

Dora had been like a sunbeam in the house, brightening everything with which she came in contact; and even now, though stricken with grief, the uncomplaining way in which she kissed the rod which had chastised her endeared her still more to her companions.

Gerald walked with her in the grounds, read and played to her, and by a hundred kindly devices tried to wean her from her sadness.

He succeeded in the end, for she was a brave hearted girl, and knew that the greatest respect she could show to the memory of the departed would be to perform her allotted tasks in life with cheerfulness.

And in doing so she found the highest form of comfort and an assuagement of her grief.

Gerald noticed this with pleasure, and loved her more dearly for it.

What would he not sacrifice to win such a being for his wife?

Edith Markham paid the Tyrrels a visit, and Dora was charmed with her, for she could trace in her features the lineaments of her husband.

She was tall and graceful; had charming eyes of a deep hazel tint, and a rich abundance of golden hair.

But Edith, with the instincts of a woman, had no sort of liking for her.

A young and pretty widow, charming, elegant and accomplished, was not the companion she would have chosen for her affianced husband.

Those emblems of grief, her sable widow's weeds, made her look interesting; and then there was her clinging, lovable manner, which appealed to the sterner sex for pity and sympathy, which are akin to love.

Besides, Gerald made no secret of his admiration for her. Edith could trace it in his every look and action, and could not be blamed for disliking this sort of thing to go on under his very eyes.

He had never been half so attentive to her, although she was not a whit less beautiful than her rival, whom she considered to be nothing more than an adventuress, and intended to put Mrs. Tyrrel on her guard on the very first opportunity.

"Oh, Gerald," she said, playfully, "you have been a sad truant of late! Why have you not been to see us?"

"To be frank with you, Edith, I do not like the way in which Douglas has been treated. Why should he be forced to marry against his will?"

Dora, without showing it, was listening intently; for was not the conversation about her husband?

"I am not to blame for that state of things, Gerald. Does your dislike extend to me?"

"You silly little goose, you know it does not! Has any news reached you of him?"

"Yes, but I sincerely hope it is not true. They say my darling brother is dead."

Dora's tears were falling fast, and she turned her head aside, lest they should be seen by others.

Confirmation was made doubly sure by these words. Her idol, the king of her heart, would never come to her more. He had gone, without a word, or a parting kiss to seal their love throughout all eternity.

She could listen to no more, for her thoughts were far away in the past, when all was radiant and happy, and she had been folded to his loving heart, and had felt his warm kisses raining on her lips.

So deeply absorbed was she that she started when Miss Markham bade her good-by.

When his betrothed had left, Gerald approached Dora, and begged her to allow him to take her into the air.

Tenderly wrapping her in a light shawl, he supported her lagging footsteps, and walked at a gentle pace in the grounds, where the birds were warbling and bees humming, as they hurried from flower to flower.

"Dora," he said—"you will not be offended if I call you that name, will you?—confide in me as a brother. I think I have already guessed at the secret of your distress. My cousin, Douglas Markham, was your husband?"

"And the brother of your affianced wife," she replied. "Yes; you are right. I see no further need for concealment."

"I am delighted to hear it! May I not tell

my mother that you are indeed one of the family? It would give her such joy, for I know she loves and esteems you highly."

"You are very kind," she replied, "but I would rather that she esteemed me as the humble girl she snatched from poverty than as the widow of Douglas Markham, who was driven forth to die."

"But he may not be dead, and if he be, it is all the more imperative that Mr. Markham and his family should recognize and provide for you suitably."

"Gerald," she said—and the word thrilled him through every nerve—"you have offered to be my brother, and as that I freely accept you, for I am greatly in need of a true heart and clear brain to help me on through life's perils. You were good enough to say that Mr. Markham would no doubt make a suitable provision for me as his son's widow; but let me tell you frankly and honestly that I would rather work with these two hands"—she held them forward, and Gerald thought them very shapely—"than be dependent on him for a penny."

He longed to take her to his heart—to tell her how brave, how beautiful she was, how much he loved her; but he resisted the impulse, and said, "I think you are right; you may rely on my not mentioning the subject again."

"Thank you," she said. "And now let me talk to you of Edith."

He turned his head aside to prevent her seeing by the expression of his countenance how distasteful the subject was to him.

"I think her very beautiful and charming; and see very plainly that she loves you truly. And you love her in return, I am sure, Gerald."

"Oh, yes!—of course!" he said nonchalantly.

"I shall be so gratified to see your happiness"—looking at him and smiling. "Your mother and yourself have been so kind to me that I feel that I cannot wish you too much felicity."

Every word she uttered was like a stab to his heart.

"Do you believe in the union of hands without hearts?" he asked. "Is one to be sacrificed to the conventional?"

Dora was silent; his words pained her, and she began to perceive the danger of the situation.

He had not positively said that he loved her, and she hoped he would not ever pain her by doing so.

It would be dishonorable of her to repay her benefactress by listening to an avowal of love from one who was the affianced husband of another, and that other his mother's choice.

"You do not answer me," he said. "Pardon me for being so pressing; but I am deeply interested in your reply."

"I believe in honor and duty," she said, quietly. "Depend upon it, true happiness lies only in that direction both for yourself and others."

"Oh, Dora!" he said; "why did we meet? I wish you could see into my inmost soul; one image only is centered there, and that is—"

"Your cousin Edith's," she said. "I feel better now, and would like to go indoors. The air gets very chilly."

He bit his lip with vexation, and led her to the hall where Mrs. Tyrrel was standing.

"Why, Gerald," she said, with a beaming smile, "what is the matter? You look vexed. I hope you two have not been quarreling; but come in. I have a request from Mr. and Mrs. Markham to visit them to-morrow, and Dora is included in the invitation."

"Oh, no! do not take me," Dora said, pleadingly, with a look of terror in her beautiful eyes.

Mrs. Tyrrel drew toward her and kissed Dora tenderly, as she whispered, "Poor stricken darling, I have guessed all. Your tears have fallen daily upon his picture. You are one of us henceforth."

Dora was satisfied that her secret was known to two true hearts; but feared for the future and for Gerald Tyrrel.

CHAPTER XII.

DEEPER DEPTHS.

ON the evening following the thieving affray, Bob Blandford, who had been allowed to escape through the intercession of Cissy and Douglas, made his promised visit to Madison Square, and was admitted, not by Thomas Sutton, who had thrown off his livery forever, and was living like a gentleman at his ease, but by a new footman.

Mrs. Blandford saw her step-son without delay. She had been expecting him, and was glad that he had come, as she had a project in hand, and wanted his assistance in carrying it out.

He was ushered into the sitting-room where she was, looking pale and ill; but she had not forgotten to array herself becomingly, for of all women in the world she always went in for effect.

Her fingers sparkled with gems, and the atmosphere of the room was heavy with perfume.

He expected an unpleasant reception from her for the part he had taken in assisting Thomas Sutton, and was delighted when she welcomed him cordially, and asked him to be seated.

She surveyed him coolly for some minutes, during which time she used her gold-stoppered smelling-bottle frequently, and said, at last: "Let me see, when did we meet last? I have a bad memory."

"Thank goodness, I have not!" he replied.

"If you wish to know, it was at the Criminal Court, where your evidence convicted me of forgery, and I was sentenced to three years' imprisonment unjustly."

"Ah," she said, nonchalantly; "now that you mention it, I do recollect something of the circumstances. You were rather troublesome about that time, were you not?"

"Perhaps so," he replied. "And you kept me quiet by having me sent to prison for a crime which I never committed."

"Is it worth while discussing that now? May I ask how it is you are at large, your sentence not yet having expired?"

He was silent, and looked at her uneasily.

"Ah," she remarked, coolly, as she toyed with the tassels of her robe, "it is an inconvenient question to answer. Well, I shall not press it; let the past be buried between us. I suppose you want money?"

"Very badly; I was never more in want of it in my life."

"Can you tell me why I should be your banker? What claim have you upon me?"

"You inherited my father's property."

"That is true. Pray go on!"

"And I was cast adrift on the world without a shilling, because you poisoned—"

She started from her chair, and said, hoarsely, "It is false! I did not do it! No one thought of charging me with the crime!"

"No; it was an open verdict. But he was poisoned, as you well know. Some one must have done it. Sarah Blake knows who."

"She is dead!" said Mrs. Blandford, maliciously.

"I know that; but before she died she made a confession in writing, which was duly witnessed by two persons—myself and another."

Mrs. Blandford sunk into a chair, deathly pale, and with beads of perspiration on her forehead, which she wiped away with her perfumed handkerchief.

"It is a base fabrication!—a conspiracy to ruin and extort money from me!"

"A jury will be the best judges of that," he said, coolly. "However, I do not wish to be hard upon you. Let us come to terms."

"How much do you want," she asked, "for that—"

She paused; and he said, quickly, "Confession, I suppose you mean. I am willing to take twenty-five hundred dollars to-day. To-morrow I shall want five thousand."

Going to the bell, and placing her hand upon it, she said, with an expression of concentrated hate and fear, "Hear my answer, Robert

Blandford! Unless you give me up that document, I shall send for a policeman, and denounce you as an escaped convict!"

He laughed mockingly; and said, with a sneer, "I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that you will be serving out your time with me. Send for a policeman by all means; but don't blame me for the consequences that will certainly ensue."

"Fiend!" she hissed, as she snatched up a knife and threatened him, with murder in her eyes, which glittered like those of a serpent.

"One crime makes another easy," he said, coolly, as he crossed his feet, and leaned back in his chair, keeping his eyes steadily fixed on hers. "Have the goodness to remember, madam, that there are witnesses who can prove my coming here—no jury would find an open verdict in this case; and think of the penalty the law would exact for—"

Replacing the knife on the table, she sunk into her chair, trembling all over, and too excited to speak.

"Is it to be peace or war, madam?"

She glared at him, but remained silent.

"Shall I summon your maid?" he asked. "Perhaps you are ill. I am in no hurry, and can wait your pleasure."

"Do you want the money now?" she asked.

"Yes," was the laconic reply.

"I do not keep so large a sum about me; but"—drawing off two valuable gold rings as she spoke—"you can hold these in pledge until I redeem them. Take them, and give me the document."

He smiled derisively, and said, "My dear madam, do you take me for a fool? If I took them, and gave you Sarah Blake's confession, you would say I had stolen them, in addition to denouncing me as an escaped convict. No, no; Robert Blandford is too sharp for even such a clever woman as yourself."

She perceived that the trap which she had so artfully laid for him was of no avail, and said, "You wrong me; I had no such intentions."

"Perhaps not," he said ironically; "but I have a memory, if you have not. I remember the trick you played me before, when I acted as your secretary, and used to prepare checks for you to sign. You asked me to practice imitating your signature, to save you trouble, and when proficient I was to sign them for you. I did so; and the first check so signed you denounced as a forgery. You know the rest."

"You were ruining me," she said; "and to save myself from beggary, I had no other alternative,—"

"Than to blast my young life by branding me as a felon! Really, madam, if all troublesome people were treated in that fashion, our prisons would be full to repletion."

"You are so unreasonable," she said deprecatingly.

"Unreasonable because I wish to guard against treachery. I think I am very reasonable, and not at all spiteful. Make me your friend."

"You cannot expect to drain me of my fortune, for the possession of which I have fought and plotted—ay, and even sinned—at least, so you say."

"I promise not to trouble you again," he said. "Surely the sum I ask will not embarrass you. Give me a check for the amount, and a written declaration that I am innocent of the crime for which I have been convicted, which I will not use unless compelled, and I will set sail for England in a few days."

"I see no objection to that, and shall arrange matters with you presently. I wish to speak with you on a subject which will benefit you materially."

"I am always ready to listen to such a pleasant topic; but"—eying the sideboard, on which were several decanters—"may I not assist myself to some refreshment? You must allow that my interview with you up to the present point has been very trying."

She assented; and while his back was turned

saw some papers in the breast pocket of his light overcoat, which was hanging over the back of a chair.

Sarah Blake's confession might be among them, and with one bold stroke be hers. She would risk it. If he was violent, she could summon assistance, and defy him.

All this passed through her brain in an instant. With a cat-like spring, she snatched the papers away, but heard a mocking laugh.

"Cleverly attempted," he said; "but let me tell you, madam, I never carry important documents in the pocket of my overcoat. I drink to your success next time; you have failed on this occasion."

He drained half a tumbler of brandy at a draught, and resumed his seat with a spiteful gleam in his eyes, saying, "You are welcome to the contents of that envelope, which contains, among other trifles not worth mentioning, a number of pawn-tickets. As I do not intend redeeming the articles, I shall make you a present of them. Possibly some of your property might have been pledged."

His badinage coming fresh upon her disappointment made her furious, and she looked longingly at the knife which still lay upon the table.

Why should she not rid herself of him forever with one blow, and allege that she did the act in self-defense against his attempt to rob her?

He seemed to guess her thoughts, for he said, as he took up the knife and placed it out of her reach, "In doing this I am once more acting the part of your friend. Come, let us act rationally, and talk over the project you spoke of."

She took a deep draught of water, which seemed to calm her, and then resumed her seat, and said, abruptly, "You have met my niece, Dora Merton?"

"Yes; but it's some time since."

"She has been married; but her husband is dead."

"I am sorry for that," he said. "But what has all this to do with me?"

"You will see. The issue of that marriage was a son. I inherited the bulk of my property from my family, and not from your father. At my death, and failing legitimate heirs, the money in the funds descends to her or her offspring."

"I don't suppose I have any reason to feel interested in your will," he said, in a tone of indifference.

"You are mistaken; you have an interest in it. I do not forget that your late father left me all he had; as a mere matter of justice you will inherit this at my death. And now let me add, while I am on this subject, you must think it strange I should speak so coolly of your father, whom you believe I poisoned. I swear, however, that I am innocent—at least in intention. I changed the medicine by mistake in the nurse's absence, and she met me at the door when I was leaving. He was a kind, good husband to me, and I had no motive for desiring that he should die."

"None, except that he threatened to alter his will in my favor. But let that pass; you are not on your trial, nor need ever be, if you are reasonable. And now to begin again where we left off: what do you want me to do? I am a man of few words, and would wish you to come to the point at once."

"I want you to help me to trace the child. The secret at present rests with a woman named Susan Prat, who wants paying heavily before she reveals it."

"If I find the child, what then?" he asked, looking at her suspiciously.

"Take it with you to England, let it be well cared for, at my expense, but be kept in ignorance of its parentage."

"Why should you be so bitter against your niece?" he asked, pointedly. "What does it matter to you whether they inherit the property?"

"My sister, by guile and deceit—ay, even by treachery—won the affections of the only

man I ever loved, and to whom I was actually engaged to be married: A woman never forgets such a wrong as that!"

"Give me the check and the document I have asked for, and I will use every effort to further your object."

As she had placed herself more deeply in his power by this revelation, she could not hesitate to comply with his demands.

Hatred of Dora because of her mother's offense had clouded her reason and prudence, which were usually so bright.

In fact, this ruling passion of her life—a desire for revenge—fully accounts for her harsh—nay, brutal treatment of her niece, whose loveliness and many amiable qualities might well have disarmed resentment.

She handed him the check and her declaration of his innocence, and in return he gave her Sarah Blake's confession, which, after glancing through, she committed to the flames.

If she could have read the thoughts that were passing through Robert Blandford's mind (who had only her to thank for being in his present unfortunate position), she would not have relied so fully on his promise.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT CROSS-PURPOSES.

MR. EDWARD MARKHAM'S seat, to which the Tyrrels and Dora had been invited, was inclosed in a delightful park, ornamented with gardens, shrubberies, and pleasure grounds.

The approach to the mansion itself was by a winding avenue more than a mile in length, leading through stately elms, and as the eye wandered over this scene of natural yet not altogether inartificial beauty, it was arrested by a lofty embattled tower rising out from the mass of undulating foliage which bounded the distance, and which had been built as an observatory.

In front of the mansion, a soft, smooth lawn, spread out a carpet of exquisite enamel to walk upon.

A few scattered trees here and there dotted the different walks, which led now to the woods, anon on to a sheet of water, upon whose clear surface swans were sailing in stately grandeur.

The broad pathway led up to the principal entrance in the center of the building, and consisted of a gable, with a large pointed window.

On entering, you found yourself in an elegant hall adorned with classic figures and other works of art.

From this hall the visitor ascended a noble stone staircase, leading along corridors into several spacious and elegant apartments, the principal of which—the saloon or drawing-room—was originally intended for a picture-gallery.

Here the ceilings, which were groined, and supported by clustered columns, added much to the beauty of the apartment.

The drawing-room led to a light and picturesque conservatory, through which the lawn was reached.

Such was the beautiful spot to which Dora was driven.

Eagerly she gazed, and sad at heart as she remembered that it had been the home of her husband, who had grown up to manhood amid these glorious surroundings.

Mrs. Tyrrel was pleased to see that the visit promised to arouse her companion, as was also Gerald, but neither of them made any comment upon the subject, fearing lest she might be recalled to a sense of her desolate position.

From his station in a clump of trees, Douglas Markham saw the carriage roll up to the mansion, but never dreamt that it contained the idol of his heart, whom he was mourning as lost.

Nor did she suspect that he was in her vicinity, or she would have flown to him on the wings of love, and nestled her head upon his breast, close to that heart which throbbed alone for her.

The visitors were ushered into the drawing-room, where they were received most cordially by Mr. and Mrs. Markham, and their daughter Edith.

Dora looked around, furtively, at the pictures, and her glance fell upon a portrait of her husband, whose face seemed to beam upon her from the canvas, and whose eyes appeared to follow her wherever she went.

So life-like was it, that she felt tempted to throw herself upon her knees before it, and implore it to speak to her.

Her brain had been weakened by the cruel shock she had sustained, and it was only by a great mental effort that she restrained herself.

She was agreeably surprised at finding that both Mr. and Mrs. Markham were charming and kind, for she had expected to meet a haughty imperious pair.

They quite took to her from the very first, Mr. Markham especially, and while Gerald was tempted into the grounds by Edith, and his wife and Mrs. Tyrrel chatted confidentially, he took Dora under his special care and explained to her the many objects of interest with which the house abounded and which dated back to the War of the Revolution.

The old man looked with pleasure upon Edith and Gerald, as they sauntered arm in arm in earnest conversation, and heaved a deep sigh as he thought over what might have been if his dear boy, Douglas, had not proved so disobedient to his wishes. Dora, too, was delighted to see Gerald paying proper attention to his betrothed.

He had not spoken or even hinted that he loved her, since she had checked his rashness with so much tact.

"They will make a handsome couple," said Mr. Markham, confidentially, to Dora. "I wish my son Douglas was here; he would be a nice companion for you, my dear. I fear Gerald is so engaged with Edith, who likes to have him all to herself, the little puss, that we shall have very little of their society. Ah, well! I must not complain, for I was quite as bad myself in my youthful days."

"Mrs. Tyrrel often speaks of your son,"—looking timidly up at him. "But pardon me; I perhaps ought not to refer to a subject which must give you pain, if what I have heard be true."

"May I ask to what you allude?"

"The rumor of his death."

Dora hazarded the subject for a motive. She was surprised that the family were not in mourning; this was strange, for the same friend who had apprised her of her husband's death ought to have sent an intimation to his parents. She waited eagerly for his reply, and averted her face lest its expression of deep anxiety should arouse his suspicions, as it might well do, considering that she and Douglas were supposed to be strangers to each other.

"Thank Heaven, the rumor is untrue," he remarked; "but he has alienated himself from me by a rash marriage."

Her face was still averted, and its expression had changed from anxiety to joy, and the tears welled into her eyes—tears of gratitude that a life so dear had been spared to her.

"It may seem strange to you," he continued, "that I should speak on such a matter at our first meeting; but somehow (and I hope you will not deem me presumptuous) I look upon you as a dear friend—as a daughter, in fact; for let me tell you, Mrs. Tyrrel's letters have been full of accounts of your sufferings, and of the heroic way in which you have borne them."

"Oh, Mr. Markham," she said, kissing his hand, "you are indeed kind! Let me plead for your son. What will not love dare and suffer for love's sake?"

"You ask too much," he said sadly. "I would willingly forgive him, and take his wife to my heart, if she were worthy of his love and of my approval; but he has chosen not to consult me in any way in the matter. She may be a mere adventuress, and have beguiled him into the marriage from sordid motives."

"Perhaps she was not aware of his wealth; perhaps all-conquering love prompted her to give him her heart, not from unworthy motives, but because she had chosen him for her idol on which to lavish rich treasures of affection."

"If you were pleading for yourself," he said, smiling at her kindly, "you could not be more eloquent or persuasive. Egad! when the young dog does come to his senses, it would answer his purpose to retain you as his advocate. I have heard from a friend of his that his wife is poor. I would not mind that at all if she were a lady by birth and education."

She felt prompted to throw herself on her knees before him, and confess all—how dearly she loved his son, her husband, how much she had suffered, and how her affection for him had strengthened now that he had risen like one from the grave.

But she resisted the impulse, and said instead, "I would stake my existence that your son, whose nobility of soul is stamped on his brow even on painted canvas, would not degrade himself and his family by an alliance with one unworthy of the honor of being connected with them."

"Nobly spoken and well!" he replied, placing his hand tenderly on her head. "Would that his choice had fallen upon such as you! I could be content!"

"Oh, that Douglas had not restricted me from confessing all!" she thought, as her heart leaped with joy, which spread to her countenance, and made her more beautiful than ever.

They were now joined by Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Tyrrel, the latter of whom was delighted to perceive the favorable impression her protegee had made upon her old friend.

And all the while that Dora was pleading his cause, Douglas Markham, almost broken-hearted and an outcast from the home of his ancestors, stood, with folded arms and yearning looks, gazing mistily through his tears on the scene of his many joys and his one great sorrow.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TRAITOR TO LOVE.

LET us now turn to Edith and Gerald, and join them in their ramble as they walk hand-in-hand in the shady avenue, guarded by mighty trees, hoary with age, which had defied the decaying hand of time.

If these leafy boughs, whispering and waving so gently in the breeze, could speak, what tales they would tell of joys, sorrows, and disappointed hopes!

Edith was brimful of happiness, and all nature, both animate and inanimate, seemed surrounded with a halo of glory such as it had never before worn for her.

"Her Gerald," as she loved to call him a hundred times each day, was with her—was all her own, and she could gaze into his handsome face, and his eyes full of the fire of intellect and health, and cling to his arm, and press his hand gently; and, oh, ecstasy of bliss, listen to his voice, which to her sounded sweeter than the sweetest music!

He had been a little cold certainly, but had thawed under the influence of her winning, gentle ways.

"And you will always be kind and gentle to your Edie, Gerald, darling?" she said pleadingly. "It would break my heart if I thought you did not love me. My love for you is such a passion as to be idolatrous. I live only for you; I dream of you; my waking thoughts are yours, and my cup of happiness overflows when you are near me! Oh, Gerald, do not think me unmaidenly because I speak out of the fullness of my heart! And let me tell you a little secret, dear: I have not been happy lately."

"You sorrowed for your brother, perhaps," he said; "but he is safe now, and we shall all be gladdened soon by again beholding him."

"No, Gerald; it was not that. I sorrowed most for myself."

"Why, Edie, dearest?"

His stubborn heart—stubborn in its love for another—was touched and softened by the gentle pleadings of the lovely maiden by his side.

"You will not be angry with me if I tell you why?" she said.

"Angry—no! Why should I?"

"Because I thought I had a rival; because I thought Dora Merton was trying to win your love, and to efface my image from your heart."

"Edie," he said, kindly but firmly, "you must not speak of her so; she is the fountain of purity and honor. You little know her noble nature. Were I free to-morrow, I would lay my fortune, my love at her feet, and ask her to honor me by accepting me."

A shade of displeasure passed over Edith's countenance; but it was quickly chased away, and she smiled as sweetly as if his words had not stung her very soul. She would not chide or anger him, but would try by ways of love and gentle words to win back his truant heart to its allegiance.

"I am sure she is all that you say," she said sweetly; "but you are not free, Gerald. I hold you with silken reins of love, and do not fear that you will ever snap them."

"You are a dear, kind Edie," he said, patting her hand gently. "I hope I may be worthy of you, my poor little Edie!"

"I hope, Gerald, that we may be worthy of each other. Let me whisper to you a secret," she continued, blushing prettily. "But no; I must keep it. It will be a surprise for you when we return to the house."

Gerald, desirous of turning the conversation into another channel, said, "Have you any suspicion, Edie?"

"Of you?" she asked. "Oh, no. Suspicion engenders doubts and fears; while love is confiding and trusting."

"I meant not that, but referred to your brother's wife. Have you any idea of whom she is?"

"None whatever; nor do I care to know. If my brother has so far forgotten himself and the honor of the family as to contract a misalliance with some unknown creature, I for one would never recognize or meet her."

"Is not that a harsh decision?" he asked. "You say you love me. If to-morrow, through circumstances over which I had no control, I became poor, would you love me still?—would you marry me?"

There was a ring of earnestness in his tone which frightened her, and she replied, "But you are not likely to become poor, Gerald. Why do you ask me such a question?"

"Because Douglas's wife is probably so circumstanced. A lady by birth and education, and possessed of beauty and accomplishments of no mean order—one fitted, in fact, to be an ornament of society, she is plunged suddenly into poverty, but not into disgrace. I would act to-morrow as he has done, and wed the woman I love, even were she in rags; ay, and I would be more gentle and tender to her because of her past trials, and my love should shield her from every earthly trouble. Yet you say you would not meet such a one, forgetting probably that she would have too much spirit to force her society upon you."

"But, Gerald, dear, I am only acting up to the principles instilled into my mind from my birth. Don't be too hard upon me. For your sake I would meet anybody, do anything, face poverty itself—even death—so long as you were near me, dearest!" And she threw her arms around his neck, and pressed her lips to his, as if to ratify her words.

Traitor though he had been to her love, he felt a return of his affection for her, and returned her caresses with a warmth that thrilled her very soul, and caused her to forget earth, sky, everything in the great bliss of the moment.

Dora and Mrs. Tyrrel were approaching, and the lovers relapsed into a state of ordinary mortals.

CHAPTER XV.

SPORT.

The day following that of Robert Blandford's interview with his step-mother, she and Thomas Sutton were seated in the dining-room—she with a cloud upon her brow, harbinger of a coming storm; he busily engaged in reading a sporting paper about the tips of a notable race.

She had an open letter in her lap, and looked angrily at him and then at it, as if they were somehow connected; and so they were.

She had just received a letter from a dear lady friend of hers telling her of a scandal which was abroad in society about her having married her footman, whom she had introduced to her guests at the recent dinner-party. The writer went on to say that if she valued her friendship and that of her own numerous friends, she would take the earliest opportunity of refuting the report.

After glaring at him, she said, harshly, "Thomas Sutton!"

"Yes, my dear," he replied. "What's the matter? Heard any disagreeable news? I am just trying to find out what is going to win the coming race. I mean to put some money on it."

"Indeed!" she replied, with a sneer; "pray, where is the money to come from?"

"Out of my allowance, of course, as your husband; unless you like to be generous for once, and give me a tenner."

"Generous, indeed! I think I have been a fool!"

"It ain't perlit to conterdict a lady; so you're welcome to your opinion, madam!"

"It's not every lady that marries her footman!"

"Right you are; it's not every footman that gets the chance!"

"I took you out of livery, and made a gentleman of you!"

"I was more independent as your footman than I am as your husband; you do nothing but bully me. I wasn't ashamed to take you to the altar, although there is a slight difference in our ages!"

"Dare you insult me, sir?"

"Truth's no insult, madam. You couldn't help being born before me, no more than I can help being younger than you."

"I wish you had never been born!" she said, spitefully.

"And wish me dead, too, no doubt. I ain't easily scared, though; the law protects me against all violence whatsoever. You want to kick up a row, and drive me away, but I don't mean to go; I am werry comfortable where I am, thank you!"

"You can read?" she said, ironically; "if so, just tell me your opinion of that!"—tossing the letter over to him.

"I can read, of course; didn't my parents pay threepence a week for my schooling?"

"Don't be so vulgar!" she said, with disgust; "but pray read that letter."

He glanced it through, and said, "It's a very friendly letter, madam, though the writing is uncommonly bad."

"Friendly!" she almost screamed. "Do you know what you have done?—lost me all my friends!"

"A precious good job for you!" he remarked. "Friends! They come here to eat your dinners and drink your wines, but if you were in trouble to-morrow they would be the first to turn their backs upon you. You despise me, but I would work for you, so that you should not soil your hands; carry coals, sweep a crossing, or do any kind of honest work, to support you, simply because you are my wife. You are better without such friends. Let 'em go, my dear; one true heart is worth a bushel of false ones!"

There was a ring of sincerity in his tone, and expressed in his look which touched her heart.

But she steeled herself against the feeling, and said, "It is high time we parted. If you

will leave me and go abroad, promising never to trouble me again, I will give you five thousand dollars!"

"Suppose I say no, what then?"

"Perhaps I have not offered enough?" she said, with a sneer.

"More than enough," he replied, rising. "As your husband, I have claims which you can't set aside; every stick in this house belongs to me by law, for you forgot to have things settled on yourself, but I'd scorn to take advantage of that. I may be vulgar, but I'm a man. No, I'll walk out of this house now, as free and independent as when I came into it. Good-by! Before you see me again, you'll have to ask my pardon."

Putting on his overcoat and hat, he opened the front door.

"Thomas, come back!" she cried. "I did not mean what I said."

"Too late!" he muttered, as he swung the door to, and walked down the steps, resolved to face the world again bravely.

"Hilloa!" said a voice at his elbow. "Where are you off to, Tom?"

"Oh, nowhere partickler," he said. "I have given myself the sack."

"I see," said Robert; "she's ashamed of you. It was the worst day's work my poor father ever did in marrying her. Never mind; I dare say everything will come right in the end."

"She's seen the last of me, Bob, unless she alters her line of conduct. I won't be dependent on any woman while I have two strong hands and a willing heart to work for myself. Besides, my wife is as cruel and spiteful as she can be. I can't forget how she treated her niece, Dora Merton."

"Ah!" said Robert; "you know the young lady? I have got something to say about her."

"Nothing but good, I hope. See here, Bob; the man who says a word against an angel like her will have to reckon with me. I'd knock him down, if he was as big as a giant."

"Come along, Tom; this is no place to speak of such matters. I want to do the lady a service, and upset my step-mother's plans."

"That's all right then," said Thomas, as they walked on together to a quiet restaurant, which they entered, and where they found themselves quite alone.

Robert unfolded Mrs. Blandford's scheme respecting the child, and asked Sutton if he knew where it now was, or anything about it.

"I don't, Bob; but Sarah Prat does."

"She told me as much," said Robert. "Depend upon it, if we are not quick about it, that woman will prevent our seeing the child."

Thomas Sutton, who was looking out of the window, said quickly:

"Why, there's Susan Prat in a Fulton ferry bus. Let's follow her in a hack!"

"Just the thing!" said Bob. "Come along!"

They stopped a hack, and told the driver to keep the omnibus in view, but not to get ahead of it, promising to pay him well for his trouble.

On getting near enough, Thomas Sutton spoke to the hackman, and pointed her out to him as she sat near the door, saying:

"When that woman gets out, tell me."

Susan alighted at the Fulton market, where she was joined by a great, coarse-looking woman, and both adjourned to a stall inside.

Our friends dismissed the hack, and followed them.

"She doesn't know you, Bob," said Thomas, "so you had better go in; perhaps you'll pick up something that will be useful. I'll be over the way, and will look out for you."

Bob strolled in, and found the pair in earnest conversation, and heard the name of Mary Frost mentioned; but they ceased when he came in, and left and walked in the direction of the ferry.

Thomas Sutton joined his friend.

"Do you know the name of Mary Frost?" Robert asked.

"Yes, I do."

"Has she anything to do with this business, do you think?"

"No, she's too honest; but she has a baby, and was in the hospital with Dora."

"Depend upon it then, we are on the right scent," said Bob. "Shall we follow them?"

Susan Prat, before entering the ferry-house, looked carefully about to see if the strange gentleman who had entered the market had followed her, for like most criminals, she was suspicious of being watched.

"Look here," said Thomas; "I know where the Frosts live. Most likely Susan Prat is going there."

"I think there can be no doubt of it, Tom. What do you propose to do?"

"Follow her; if she doesn't go it won't matter; if she does, we can spoil her little game."

"All right," said Bob; "I like this detective business. It's quite refreshing to be looking after somebody, instead of somebody looking after me."

"They were soon across the ferry, and following in the wake of Susan, who, with her companion, quickly reached the tenement where the Frosts lived."

Robert Blandford walked down the street past the house and came upon Susan's accomplice, who was at the corner, evidently waiting for her.

Going up to her, he placed his hand on her shoulder, saying, "I am a detective, and know all about your business; you are here to steal a child, and your pal, Susan Prat, is in there at work."

"Please, sir, I know nothing about it, 'cepting that a lady asked me to take a baby to nurse."

Thomas Sutton then came, and Robert beckoned him forward.

When he came up, he said, "Police-officer, just keep your eye on this woman while I go into that house."

Sutton winked, and touching his hat respectfully, said, "All right, sir; hadn't I better keep her out of sight?"

"Yes, do; you know my signal—three whistles. When you hear them you can join me."

Meanwhile Susan Prat had been at work, and commenced it by telling the eldest child that she was a friend of his mother's, and asked where she was.

"Mammy's out with daddy," the little fellow answered, "and I am to take care of my little brothers and sisters. Mammy's going to bring us cakes home!"

"Wouldn't you like some now?" asked Susan. "Suppose you and the other little mites go out and buy some?"—offering him sixpence.

"Me can't. Baby is too little; and he'd cry—wouldn't you, baby?—if brother Tom left you?"

Baby crowed and held out his chubby arms when Susan took him from the cradle, and nursed him with professional skill.

"There, you see," she said, "he's quiet with me; so be off and buy your cakes."

The children went on their pleasant errand; and having watched them out of sight, Susan wrapped baby in a shawl, and was in the act of carrying it off, when Robert Blandford walked in, and said, "Is Mrs. Frost at home?"

Susan turned pale, for she recognized him as the man whom she had seen in the private bar, and suspected mischief.

"She is not," Susan replied; "and I don't know when she will be in."

"Let me see," he said, looking at her curiously; "where did we meet before? Ah, I recollect now! You were in custody for stealing a diamond bracelet, and your name is Susan Prat, formerly a hospital nurse."

"I can't deny it," she said. "Who may you be? You haven't any business with me, I'm sure!"

"You're mistaken. I have your accomplice, who is in custody, and has confessed all."

Taking a dog's whistle from his pocket, he blew it thrice, and turning to her, said, "I am

a detective. You had better make a clean breast of it if you wish to escape punishment."

Thomas Sutton sent the woman in, but remained outside himself, not caring to be seen by Susan at this stage of the proceedings.

Mary Frost now came in—as was her custom at this hour—to attend to the children; and was surprised to see so many visitors.

The upshot of the affair was, that Susan Prat confessed that the child was Dora's and that she had changed it for Mary's dead baby at the instigation of a certain lady, whose names she declined to give, not caring to incur afresh the enmity of such a dangerous person as Mrs. Blandford.

She made this confession in writing, and it was duly signed by Robert Blandford and Thomas Sutton.

Susan and her companion were allowed to leave after they had given their addresses, which Robert Blandford shrewdly suspected were false.

But as he had gained his point, this did not much matter.

It was arranged that Mary, Thomas Sutton, and Robert Blandford should take the child to Dora, whose address was known, as she had written to the Frosts from Mr. Markham's.

"I'll put it in her arms myself," said Mary, "and be glad to do it, for she's a dear good friend to all of us. If it had been anybody else, I would have fought for the child that I suckled at my breast, and that crept into my heart until I loved it more dearly than any of my other children. It will make Dora so happy, poor girl—she's suffered much!"

Thomas Sutton and his friend promised to call for her at an early hour next day, and left the place well satisfied with the success of their undertaking.

CHAPTER XVI.

RECONCILIATION.

GERALD TYRREL was an enigma to himself. Engaged to one who loved him madly, and who possessed title, wealth, and rare beauty, he loved another passionately, although she was his cousin's wife.

If he could purchase peace of mind, he would gladly have parted with half his worldly possessions, for of all men he was most miserable.

Hitherto, life had gone smoothly with him, and no strong passions had ruffled its surface.

He was now experiencing what it was to do battle with self, to wrestle and strive like a gladiator with a monster which threatened to wreck his honor as well as his happiness.

"Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall," is a wise maxim, and one which poor humanity ought to remember always.

With a soul ill at ease, he took his gun, and wandered off into the woods.

He craved for solitude, and escaped from the social duties imposed upon him, feeling that music and other charms of refined society, but ill accorded with his present state of mind.

When he was shut out from human ken, he threw himself on a grassy knoll, and gave way to the despair which gnawed at his heart, and made him curse the hour of his birth, and also that of his meeting with Dora.

A perfect stillness reigned around him, broken only by a soft rustling of the leaves in the evening breeze.

Raising himself on his elbow, he looked around, and saw a well-known form, that of his cousin Douglas, who was standing with his back toward him, evidently lost in deep meditation.

Like a flash of lightning in a summer's sky, there crossed the mind of Gerald Tyrrel a terrible temptation, which appalled him.

Douglas and he had grown up together; shared each other's sport and pastimes. They loved each other with a depth and intensity far exceeding that of any tie of brotherhood.

Now he hated him, because he was Dora's husband, and the tempter whispered, "Slay

him! You can then possess her. No eye sees you; no tongue can tell of the deed which will sweep him from your path forever!"

So great was his agony in this hour of his temptation, that cold perspiration stood in great beads upon his fevered brow, and fell upon his hand like splashes of rain.

But he resisted the fearful temptation, and rising and approaching Douglas, said, "Welcome home, cousin! You have been missed by those who love you, and who have been waiting to make merry and kill the 'fatted calf,' for the return of one who, like the prodigal son, had gone away into a far-off country."

"I am glad to see you, Gerald!" Douglas said shaking his cousin's hand cordially. "Will you do me the favor of not mentioning our having met?"

"Why? If you only knew that in yonder mansion there is a woman—an angel, I should say—who hungers for a sight of you, you would fly to her without a moment's delay."

"Gerald, I am in no mood for jesting."

"I was never more serious in my life. I refer to your wife."

"Impossible! How came she there? Do they know who she is? If so, they would cast her forth, as I have been!"

Leading Douglas by the hand, they seated themselves on the grassy knoll, when Gerald told him the sad story of Dora's life since husband and wife had parted, of his (Gerald's) fateful meeting with her, of the love his mother bore her, of her kind reception by his (Douglas's) family, and of the cruel report which had reached Dora of her husband's death.

The cousins talked long and earnestly, and made certain arrangements which gladdened both their hearts.

When Gerald parted from Douglas he was his old self again. Henceforward Dora would be to him as a dear sister; his unholy passion for her had fled with the awful temptation that had agonized his soul.

On returning to the house he was so bright and cheerful, and looked so handsome, that Edith was ready to fall in love with him over again.

She, too, was looking radiantly happy, for their wedding-day had been fixed, and he in two months' time would be hers forever.

Seating himself near her, he pressed her hand tenderly, and whispered, "Would dear Edie like to take a stroll with me? I wish to tell her a little secret, and she shall tell me her promised secret in return."

She whispered, "Yes, darling. Where you are is paradise to me."

Under the moonlight, and with the scent of sweet flowers perfuming the air, and the soft, thrilling notes of the nightingale falling melodiously upon the ear, Gerald told her of her brother's return, and of Dora being his wife.

"He is waiting for her in yonder thicket," he said. "Let us lead her to him, will you, Edie darling?"

"Yes," she said. "He has chosen me a sister whom I can love. Leave the matter to me. I will bring her here while you await my return."

With womanly tact she beguiled Dora into accompanying her to her room with the avowed object of showing her a choice collection of jewelry.

As soon as they entered, she embraced Dora tenderly, saying, "Why did you not tell me you were my own dear sister? Somebody is waiting for you where the robins sing, to speak to you of love?"

"Is it Douglas?" she asked, with a beating heart and beaming eye.

"Yes," was the simple answer.

In the gloaming two hearts again met, two souls were rejoined, husband and wife were once more together and in gladness, having parted in sorrow.

"Come, Dora, my beloved," he said; "let us ask our parents' pardon and their blessing."

Gerald and Edith preceded them, to break the welcome intelligence of Douglas's return to his father and mother.

Edith did this with consummate judgment.

When Mr. Markham went forth to welcome his son, he found Dora, radiantly beautiful in her happiness, leaning lovingly on his arm.

"Douglas, my son, how is this? Do you know this lady?"

"She is my wife."

Edward Markham folded her to his heart, and kissed her tenderly, saying, "Douglas, you have made me the proudest and happiest of men in giving me such a daughter. Come, let us share our joy with dear mother."

Impossible to describe the happiness which followed; it was a "joy with which the stranger intermeddled not."

And when that same evening the post brought a letter from Mary Frost, telling Dora that she would restore her child on the morrow, and explaining how the discovery had been brought about, a new joy and cause of rejoicing was given to the already happy family circle.

When Susan Prat, more in malice than in kindness, told Mrs. Blandford of the part which her husband and step-son had taken in restoring Dora's child to its mother, she received such a shock that medical aid had to be called in, when it was found that death—that grim enemy which she so much dreaded—was close upon her!

She died with no loving hand to close her eyes when she journeyed along "the valley of the shadow of death!"

She was buried with great pomp and ceremony, but no mourners followed her to the grave. "As we sow, so do we reap."

She had sown tares of hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, and found at the last that her life had been altogether unprofitable.

When her will was opened it was found that she had left her husband a legacy of ten thousand dollars, without acknowledging their relationship, simply describing him as "Thomas Sutton, my footman."

After making a few trifling bequests, to Robert Blandford among others, she left the bulk of her property to Dora, to whom indeed it belonged by right.

A month later, a little group stood on the deck of a vessel bound from New York to Liverpool.

The central figures were Robert Blandford, Cissy, his wife, and their infant child, who were going to make themselves a home, where his past would be forgotten, and a future of toil and honest industry would reinstate him in the good opinion of his fellow-men.

Douglas, Dora, Thomas Sutton, and John Clayton were present to bid them farewell.

When the bell rung as a signal for friends to wish the voyagers their last "good-by," Dora slipped a sealed envelope into Cissy's hand, as she whispered, "It is a present for my god-daughter."

It contained a hundred-dollar bill.

Of the other personages of this story, Susan Prat faded out of knowledge altogether; Thomas Sutton was appointed Mr. Markham's steward and agent, while the Frosts were installed in the cosy lodge which graced the entrance to the old estate.

In the month of August the wedding bells rung merrily peal after peal, and down the grand old avenue a bridal party passed in a gay procession of carriages.

It was the wedding-day of Gerald Tyrrel and Edith Markham, and a union of hearts as well as hands, for the trials through which he had passed had purified and strengthened his love for her, his blushing bride, whose beauty was the delight of all beholders.

Dora and Douglas were there, looking happy and at peace with the whole world; they too had wedded for love's sake.

THE END.

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